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Research: Using The LAVC Library Databases

So, your professor has asked you to do research for an upcoming assignment. They may have also asked for "scholarly journals," or "peer reviewed sources," or they have told you to use the LAVC library in some way. This handout will help you get started using the LAVC Library to do research. Even if you are familiar with the library, this handout may give you some helpful tips.

What are Databases?

A **library database** is a searchable electronic collection of published, credible sources of information like magazines, journals, newspapers, encyclopedias, medical studies, etc. "Credible" means that the information is correct, current, and written by experts on the subject. Sometimes the sources in databases are also "peer reviewed," which means they are even more credible because other experts looked at them to make sure they are good sources. Thus, databases are kind of like Google, but someone has already looked through lots of junk to find good information so that you don't have to. There are many different kinds of databases. Deciding which database to use depends on what information you need. Databases are accessed through the college library.

Why Use Databases? (Can't I just Google it?)

- All databases have some common features that are very helpful that Google does not have. These features include completed citations in MLA, APA, etc. as well as the ability to email the source to yourself, or download it, so you can find it again later. (On most databases, these options are on the right or left hand side of the screen.)

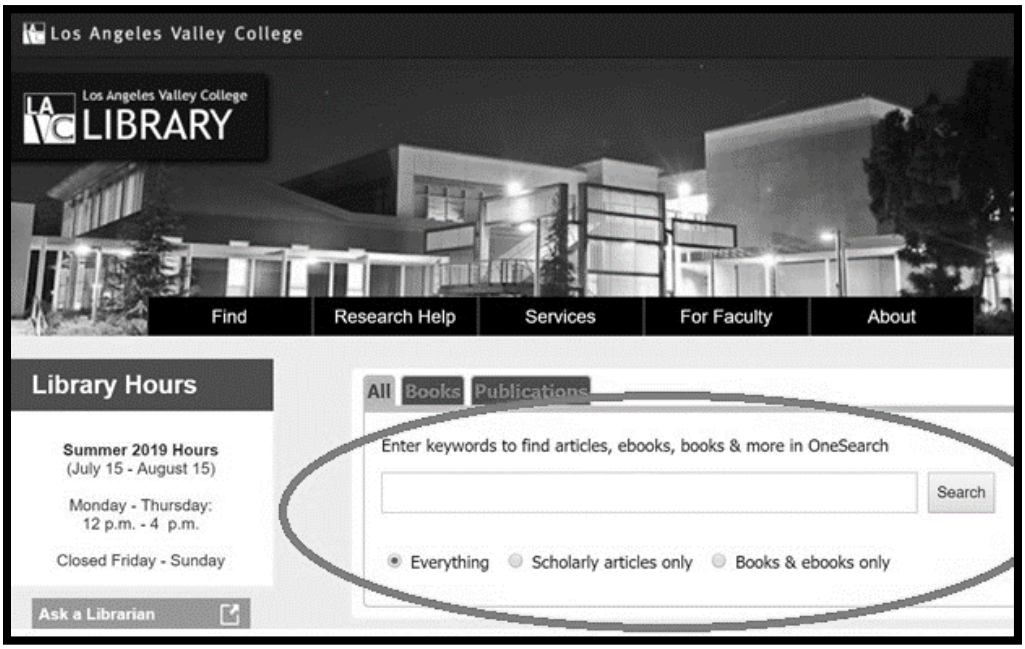
- Databases are important because experts have checked the resources to make sure they have credible information. Google does not do this, which means you could be getting advertisements or incorrect information instead of the information you need (unless you use Google Scholar, please see our handout on that).

- Your school pays a lot of money for access to these databases, so most of what you find in these database cannot be accessed on Google for free.

- If you professor asked for a "peer reviewed journal article" you will not be able to find this on Google.

Accessing Databases

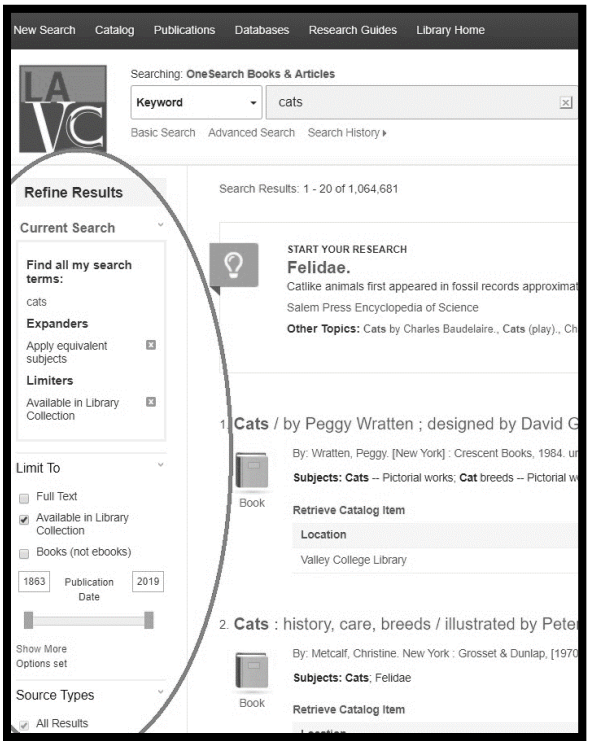
When you go to http://www.lavc.edu/library/home.aspx you will see this page:



You can type words in the large search box on the library home page.

When you type search terms in this box, remember to use "keywords."

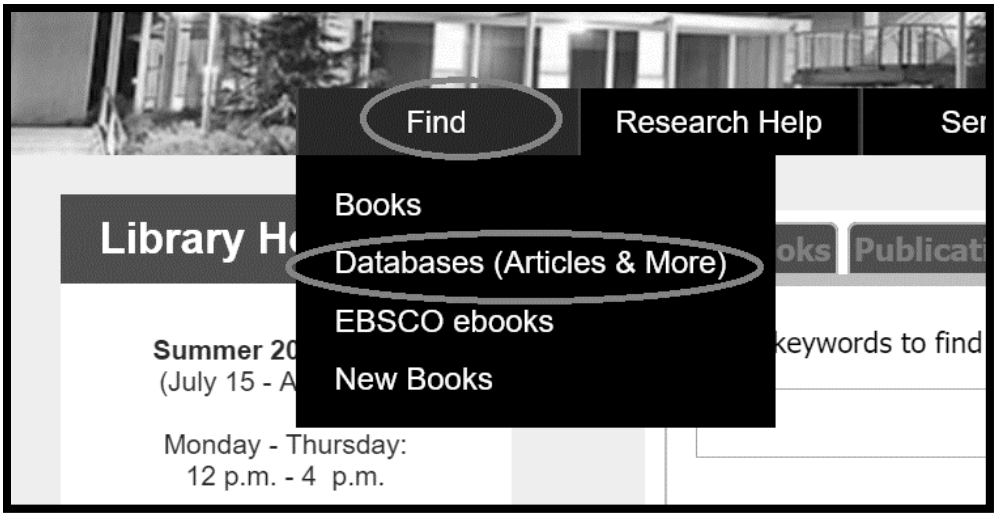
Keywords are the most important words in a question. For example, if you want to answer the question "Does Facebook protect user's privacy?" you should just type the words "Facebook" and "Privacy" in the search box. You do not need words like "the" "and" "on" because there are too many sentences in the world that also use these words and it makes it hard to find what you need.



Once you have typed your keywords in the search box on the library homepage, click "Search." You will see a page with a lot of different results that can look confusing, but don't worry. You can narrow down results by availability (online or in the library), publication type (magazine, newspaper, etc.) and publication date using the controls on the left hand side. It is also best to click "full text" or you might get a description of a source that you cannot actually look at.

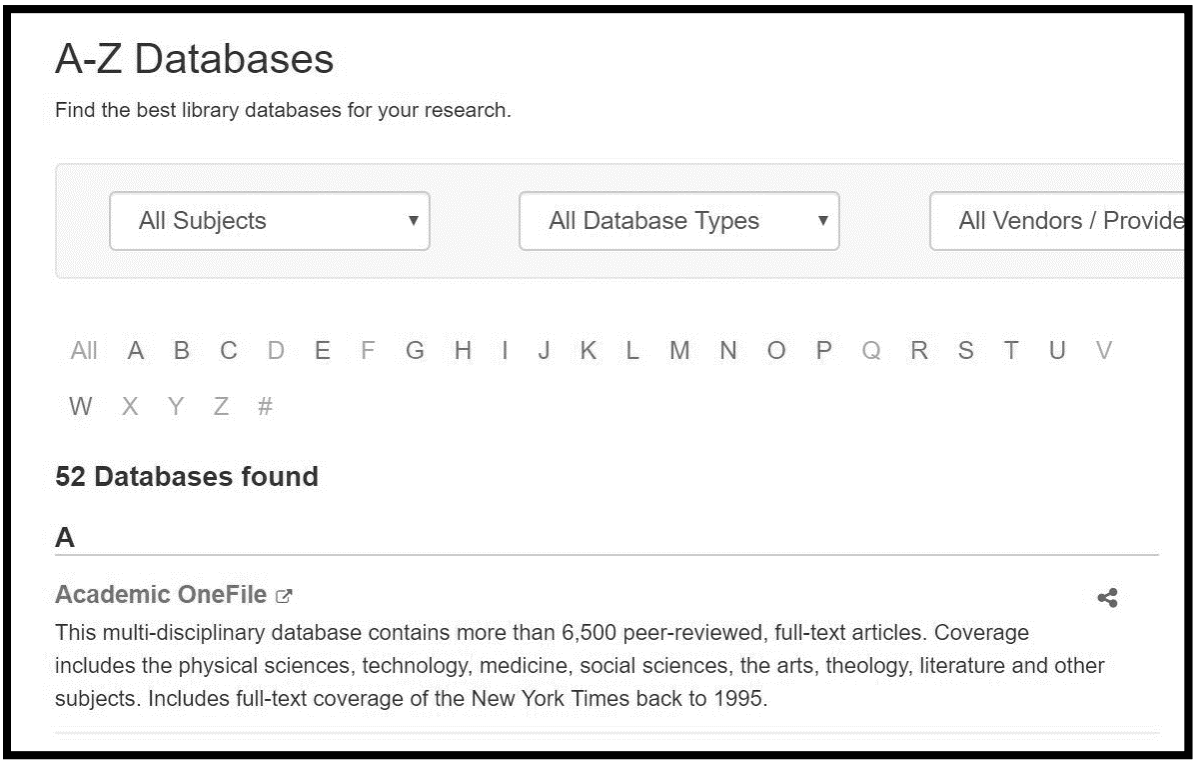
However, using the search box on the library homepage will give you a lot of different search results from a lot of different places. Sometimes, it can be better to search specific databases instead.

Exploring the Library Databases



Instead of typing in the large box on the library homepage, you can click on the tab that says "find." A drop down menu will appear as pictured here. Click where it says "Databases."

You will see a page that looks like this



This page lists the databases in alphabetical order.

If you are unsure which database to use, you can use the drop down menu that says "All Subjects" and pick the subject you are doing research on. Some subject options are "art," "biography," "psychology," etc. After you choose a subject, you will get a list of databases that might be helpful to you. Each database has a description under it explaining what it does. Choose a database, then click on the link to that database. For example, where it says "Academic OneFile" in the picture above, this is a link to the Academic OneFile database.

Know your Databases

As a college student, it is a good idea to become familiar with the databases that will be the most helpful to you. After all, you will need to do research for many of your college classes. Below is a list of popular databases, a description of what they are for, and some helpful tips about them.

Gale eBooks (Previously known as Gale Virtual Reference Library) Think of this source as academic Wikipedia. Since most professors do not allow the use of Wikipedia, you can use this instead. It is a collection of many academic encyclopedias (Wikipedia is just one encyclopedia and it is not academic). After you search a topic, you will see links to many different encyclopedia entries on that topic. You can look at more than one of these entries to really understand your topic. Each entry will usually give you a definition of the thing you are researching and some historical background. This is a good place to start your research.

Academic OneFile This database is a good place to look for a "peer-reviewed journal article" if your professor has asked for this. Peer reviewed journals are fancy academic magazines that contain articles. These articles are longer and full of more detailed information than a regular magazine article, so it is a good idea to narrow down your topic before searching for one of these. Academic OneFile has journal articles on pretty much every subject including the physical sciences, technology, medicine, social sciences, the arts, theology, and literature.

Literature Resource Center This database is for literature and allows you to search "overviews" of well-known stories, novels, plays, poems, and other literary works. An overview of a work helps you understand what the author, like Shakespeare, Edgar Allen Poe, etc. is talking about.

CQ Researcher If you are writing an argumentative paper or a research paper about a popular, controversial topic like gun control, climate change, women's health, etc. this is a great database. It offers an overview of a topic including background information, history, and pro/con (for and against) arguments. Also, check out the little numbers at the end of each sentence. These are called "footnotes," and you can actually click on them and it will link you to the source CQ Researcher used for that information. You can use these sources in your paper too. (Just be careful, not all of these links are peer reviewed, but will still be considered credible).

Opposing View Points This database is similar to CQ Researcher because it explores popular, controversial topics. It will help you find many sources on a topic from different authors that agree and disagree with an argument about that topic.

Jstor- This is a popular database for finding journal articles on subjects like English, art, and music, although it has some psychology, and health policy too. Remember, this is an "archival" database, which means everything in it is at least three years old.

CINAHL Plus with Full Text (EBSCO)- This database is very good for nursing majors and topics related to nursing.

US Newstream
This database gives you free access to full-text articles from almost 1,000 different newspapers including the Los Angeles Times (1985 to current), Chicago Tribune, and The Wall Street Journal. Normally, full online access to these newspapers costs money. If you are working on an essay on a topic that is in the news often, like a political topic, this can be a useful database.

Newspaper Source Plus
This is similar to US Newstream because it gives you free access to newspapers, but this database also includes television and radio news also.

Kanopy You may not know that watching videos counts as research too! This database gives you no cost commercial free access to educational videos from places like PBS, BBC, Criterion Collection, and Media Education Foundation. It is not exactly like Netflix, it does not have popular TV Shows and Movies, so it is better to search for videos by topic not title.

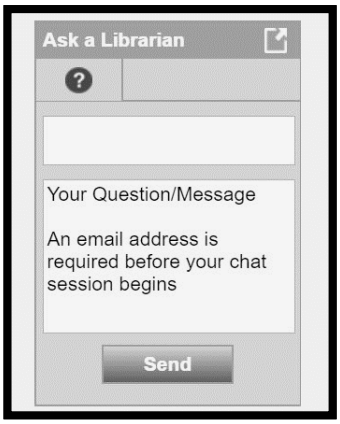
Swank This is similar to Kanopy because it has free educational videos and documentaries, but it has some popular films like Netflix or Hulu does. Most of the popular movies it has are the older, award winning ones. If a professor asks you to watch a movie as part of the class you may be able to find it on here for free.

PrepSTEP This database is great for preparing for tests. It has sample tests, tutorials, and skill building activities in subjects like math, English, computer skills and college success. If you think you need extra help in these areas this is a great place to go.

World History in Context This databases offers overviews of people, events and topics in world history. When you search a topic, this database brings up a collection of sources like biographies, journals, primary sources, court cases, images and videos that all help you understand a historical issue better.

Off Campus Access

If you are a currently enrolled student, you can access the library databases from home. After you select a database, a box will pop up asking you to login. Your login is everything before the "@" in your LACCD email address, and your password is your month and day of birth (for example, if your birthday is April 25, 1995, your password is 0425).



IF You need More Help

If you need more help, please see the Library Reference Desk on the first floor of the LARC building, or you can chat with a librarian online by clicking on “Research help” on the library homepage, then clicking “Ask a Librarian” at the bottom of the drop down menu. A box will open on the left hand side that looks like this ←