PADM 664 – Search Tips

These tips supplement and complement the demonstrations in class for searching databases for sources to support your policy briefs.

Tips for All Databases:

- Use quotation marks – “xxxxx xxxxx” – when you are searching for phrases.
- Look for a peer-reviewed or scholarly or academic link to limit to scholarly articles.
- Use the limiters and other tools within the database to save time and effort.
- Look at the abstract and search terms that are attached to promising references – you should discover additional vocabulary to try.
- Use navigation aids in the database, e.g., back to results, modify search, rather than using the browser back button.
- Search history is usually retained for the session; look for # recent searches or search history or previous searches.
- Look for links to articles that cite your article (e.g., cited by) and to sources used in your article (e.g., references). These will lead you forward and backward from your article.

1. Social Services Abstracts (ProQuest) [NOTE: The other ProQuest databases, e.g., PAIS Index, Sociological Abstracts, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts are similar, but see the note for ABI/INFORM Collection below]

Example: Building a search and using database features to limit / expand

1st line - homeless* [NOTE: The * will pick up variations of the word ‘homeless’]
2nd line – "local government" OR city OR municipality OR county
There will be 870+ results

Note the choices under Source Type and Document Type on the right. These can be very useful when you are looking for a particular type of material. Look at the Publication Date graph. It sometimes will provide clues as to when an issue became important. Note that you can enter date ranges if you wish.

Select Peer reviewed. The number of results will decrease to about 595+.

Select ‘preview’ for several of the references and note words such as health care services, youth, housing, shelters. If you decide to add these to the search --
Select modify search and add a row to enter the terms to your search. The 3rd line might look like this: youth OR "young adults" OR children
*NOTE for ABI/INFORM Collection: Select Anywhere except full text. ABI/INFORM has much full text in it, and this choice will search just the relevant parts of the reference, i.e., title, abstract, subject terms, and ignore the irrelevant use of your terms in the very last paragraph of a long article.

2. Public Administration Abstracts (EBSCO) [NOTE: The other EBSCO databases, e.g., Business Source Complete, are similar]

Search Example:
1st line – homeless*
2nd line – "local government" OR city OR municipality OR county
There will be about 42+ results

Limit to scholarly articles - Select scholarly (peer reviewed) from the limiters on the left
This will reduce the number of results to around 40+

Look at the abstracts and the subjects being used to describe the records. You might decide to change the 2nd line to read:
"local government" OR cities OR municipal* OR county OR metropolitan
There should now be about 44+ peer-reviewed results