Strategizing your Search

You have a variety of options in order to conduct your research. We suggest starting with the VCU Libraries Search, then consider branching out into a subject specific database.

Let’s research attachment theory, exploration, and pet-human relationships. Starting from the gold search box at library.vcu.edu, enter the main concepts attachment theory pet human. This search yields a strong set of results.

You will probably want to narrow your search for more specificity, remember that the right toolbar is an excellent option to focus by publication year, material type, language, and more. Let’s start by selecting the most recent ten years of research. This search narrowed the results and still has plenty of books, articles, dissertations and other materials.

To learn more about any item, click the title.

Scroll to review the details about the item you selected. You will usually see a list of subjects and a description. Sometimes you will see ideas of verbiage to use in future searches, so you may want to take notes. For example, in the Subjects, we see “companion animal” and “mental health”, then in the description we see “human pet relationships.”

For online materials, you will refer to the “view it” box with links to access the full text. Every link is a bit different, sometimes you may go directly to the full text in html, like this example, but sometimes you may only see an abstract which you would then look for a link to the full-text. You may have noticed we do see an option for the article as a pdf, so let’s use that since it’s easy to download and cite.

Remember that with scholarly research, you can always drill down into the bibliography – a process often called “citation mining.” In this case, there are plenty of potential articles and books that I may want to review from my own research perspective. Reviewing specifically related works is an important part of the research process.

Let’s review a second item, a book called. Scrolling down, we can see that under subjects we have “human animal relationships” and “human behavior”. Scrolling further, with some books you will not only see a description, but also a Table of Contents. This book looks very interesting and is available online (scroll to View it), but in the interest of time, let’s continue reviewing the results.

The third item also looks interesting. For subjects we have “human animal bond”. Again, you’ll see some very helpful language here that might help determine usefulness to my research, and potential search strategies.

Always look past the first set of results. Each set is only ten records, and I often find that if my first set of records isn’t particularly of interest, digging in a bit further is helpful. It pays to dig in, no matter if your first ten records were successful or off-the-mark!

We are still at the early stages of our research, so a lot of the notes we’ve taken may help us discover layers of specificity that we can bring into our research process.

We can alternate our search terms in the VCU Libraries Search. For example, looking at my notes I could focus my search by gender or by age differences in attachment.

Remember, you can use these same search strategies in a subject specific database. Start at guides.library.vcu.edu and select the discipline you are researching. Each guide will refer you to the top databases in your field.

If you need additional research assistance, visit library.vcu.edu/askus.