Using VCU Libraries Search: Advanced Searching

The Advanced Search in the VCU Libraries Search can help you find more relevant information if you already have a clear idea of the information you need. The advanced search option can be found on the libraries homepage underneath the main search box. Clicking this link brings you to a new page with various options for creating a dynamic search.

My research is focused on the ethics of assisted suicide. To start my search, I’ll enter “ethics” and “assisted suicide” into separate boxes. And, then, once I have entered my terms, I’ll click the blue search button. I will have a long list of results that I may need to focus it a little bit better.

I should examine the drop down menus to the right of my search boxes to see if any of those options might improve my search. The first option, Publication Date, allows me to choose how far back I want to go in the literature. Since I am most interested in the current ethics of assisted suicide, I can choose that the results yielded are within the last 10 years.

Next, I can look at the Material Type. This option might be helpful if you know that there is something very specific you need, such as a musical score, or a particular book. Right now, I am interested in any information, no matter the material, so I will leave that at “All Items.”

The third option is Language, and I am going to specify that I only need materials in “English.” And, finally, Search Scope I am going to leave at “Everything.” I can change this later, if I would like. I can see that simply selecting, narrowing my search to the last 10 years is going to give me a much more specific list of results.

Besides these parameters I have already set, there are still other things I can do to power my search, such as adding in an additional search term.
I can connect related words to terms I’ve already tried by using the word “OR.” For example, in order to find information even more relevant to my search, I might try adding a similar term in the same box. After the words “assisted suicide”, I’ll add the words “OR euthanasia.” This will cause my search to pull up information related to either “assisted suicide” or “euthanasia.” If I search again with this additional information, I’ll see that my results have greatly increased, capturing new records.

I now have a solid list of results and will want to explore this list further. Under each entry, I can check the Details tab to find out more information about that item. You will find that the Subjects listed in the Details tab are often helpful to let you know more about that item and, also, make sure you have the most relevant search terms.

Using the terms I see in the Titles or in the Subjects, I can continue narrowing down my search. We can explore the drop-down options next to each search box to make further specifications. The first menu allows me to tell the search to look for my terms in certain places. If left at the default Any, my terms could appear in the title, the author, description, really anywhere. I can make this more specific by selecting “in title” or “in subject”, ensuring that the word in the search box appears precisely where indicated in my results list.

Another option is to use the left sidebar next to the results list. For tips on how to use the sidebar, watch the video, Using VCU Libraries Search: Part 2. Research is a process, and my search may not work perfectly every time. I need to keep experimenting with different terms, and various search tools to find good information to support my research.

If you have a question about any of the advanced search features, or finding information, just ask a librarian.
If you need additional research assistance, just ask us:
www.library.vcu.edu/askus