



The Savvy Researcher

Self-guided
Term Paper Exercises

6: Power Searching in EBSCO Indexes: Using Subject Terms

Library Website: <http://library.clackamas.edu>

Reference Assistance: (503)657-6958 x2290

Keyword searching sometimes retrieves many “false hits” among the useful articles. For many topics, you can use EBSCO’s **Subject** search to eliminate these and quickly obtain a set of good, relevant articles.

This Guide covers precision searching in EBSCO indexes by using **Subject Term** searching to:

- eliminate false hits and find articles that really focus on a topic
- choose the most effective search terms for a topic
- narrow a search with the “subdivisions” feature.
- expand a search with the “explode” feature.

A. KEYWORD vs. SUBJECT SEARCHING

1. Open *Academic Search Premier*. Do a **keyword** search for “cougars.”

How many hits are there? _____

How many of the first 10 articles are about cougars, as in the animal, *Puma concolor*? _____

What are the false hits about?

2. Click the **Subject Terms** tab to **browse** for “cougars” in the subject headings list.

What term is *ASP* using for these animals? _____

Click the new term; mark it and click add, then **search**.

(Or just go back to Keyword search and use the new term.)

How many hits are there? Total: _____ scholarly journals: _____ magazines: _____ newspapers: _____

3. Another way to get these more relevant articles is to search for your term in the **Subject** field *only*.
(The “default” is to search in the article title and summary as well as in the subject field.)

Enter “pumas” in the top line and change **default** fields to **subject**. Search. # hits _____

4. Try another: Search for information about tanks – the armored vehicles, not tanks used for storing gases.

Subject term(s) used by ASP: _____ # hits: _____

5. Try it with a search term of your choice. Your starting keyword: _____ # hits: _____

Subject term(s) used by ASP: _____ # hits: _____

Search *ASP*’s term in the subject field: # hits: _____

B. BROWSING FOR BROADER, NARROWER, AND RELATED TERMS

EBSCO's Subject Terms feature may suggest additional terms that will be useful for your search.

Subject terms used are different in each individual index; in some indexes the list is called a "Thesaurus."

If you are getting too few results, try a broader term; if too many, try a narrower term.

1. Click **Subject Terms**. Browse for "adoption."

Notice the terms with subheadings, such as "Adoption – Law & Legislation."

[Sometimes you will find exactly the topic you need in this list. You can mark and search the term.]

Click the link for "Adoption." This opens a display of search terms – you may find some that are exactly what you are looking for. Give one example of each of the following:

A "Broader Term" _____ A "Narrower Term" _____

A "Related Term" _____ A term not used in *ASP* _____

2. Try it with a keyword of your choice. Your term: _____

Subject Term used by ASP: _____ A "Broader Term" _____

A "Narrower Term" _____ A "Related Term" _____

C. USING HIDDEN "ASPECT" SUBJECT HEADINGS

The following are some standard subject headings used in many EBSCO indexes. Even though these do not appear in the Subject Terms lists, you can include them in your search for added precision.

Economic Aspects	Moral & Ethical Aspects	Public Opinion
Environmental Aspects	Physiological Aspects	Religious Aspects
Government Policy	Political Aspects	Social Aspects
Health Aspects	Psychological Aspects	Sociological Aspects
Law & Legislation		

For example, you could search for: *assisted suicide and ethical aspects*
slavery and economic aspects

1. Try it – select one of the above "aspects" that would be useful for your topic and include it in your search (You may wish to search for it in the subject field).

Search Statement: _____ # hits: _____

2. Try another "aspect":

Search Statement: _____ # hits: _____