

# Literature Searching

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How do you find academic research (books, papers, etc) on a particular topic?  
This page focuses on the core issues of: the **Topic**, the **Context**, and your **Treatment**.

The *next page* helps you select a database type and adapt or correct your search.

The final page is a *checklist to evaluate* the results of that search.

## The TOPIC – Write a *Problem Statement or Research Question*

The **problem statement** states the essence of what you are researching, preferably in one simple sentence; you may instead phrase it as a question, the **research question**. This statement or question makes it easier to find and recognise promising search results.

## The CONTEXT

But research is rarely just about the stated topic.

Know the background as it relates to your topic.

- Be aware of underlying assumptions in your research question ... and in the search results!
- What varying points of view, if any, or theoretical models will be relevant?
- If there is any required reading, at least skim through it.
- Perhaps reread the topic as it is covered in your textbook or a suitable *encyclopaedia* or *handbook*.
- If the topic is complex, perhaps search for other material giving an overview of your topic — such as *review articles*.

### A relevant *Review Article*

- Is a valuable summary of articles, papers, books, and other resources of interest.
- Is an excellent source to check for alternative terms or phrases (needed in some searches).
- May indicate what is accepted as fact or contentious — or emerging, related fields of research.
- Some databases enable you to limit your search to review articles.

Does your Research question need *adjusting* after your background reading?

## Your TREATMENT

Your treatment must reflect your intended AUDIENCE and PURPOSE.

- What level of detail is appropriate?
- Are there local factors that may not be covered well in the research literature?
- Are you obliged to ...
  - Use a particular format — including word-length, layout, citation style, etc?
  - Assume a specified approach — conditions, hypothesis, methodology?
  - Include or exclude certain material?