Literature Searching

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 *encyclopedia* 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 ...  
  o Use a particular format — including word-length, layout, citation style, etc?
  o Assume a specified approach — conditions, hypothesis, methodology?
  o Include or exclude certain material?