

## Step 1: Plan your search – analyse your topic:

- **Identify the different concepts** (ideas) your topic covers.
- **Note keywords and phrases** that describe each of these concepts that must appear in the records that you retrieve from your searches.
- **Note acronyms and differences in spelling** between US and UK English.
- Example – there are at least 2 concepts in this topic: “**Discuss the impact of tobacco smoking in adolescents**”
  - **Concept 1** relates to *tobacco*, so you could use the following keywords in your searches: **smoking tobacco cigars cigarettes**
  - **Concept 2** relates to the *age group of smokers*, so you could use the following keywords in your searches: **adolescents youths “young people”**
  - **Concept 3** – if you find a large number of results when you use keywords for the first two concepts you may want to further limit the results you retrieve by looking for information on young tobacco smokers in a particular *geographical area* - so you could use the following keywords in your searches: **glasgow scotland**
- **Apply search rules** for the databases you decide to search for information. Look up the truncation symbol needed for specific databases – unfortunately it varies between databases! Check how to perform “phrase searches” – not all databases need “quotation marks” to carry out a phrase search. Refer to the search rules table of commonly used databases here at Aberdeen.
- **Link all the keywords and phrases** back together using **Boolean operators**; the most commonly used linking words are **and or** (and less frequently **not**). All the keywords that mean the same thing and describe the same concept are linked by **or**; all the different concepts are linked by **and**.
- **Your finished search string** (we sometimes refer to this as your **search strategy**) on the *Scopus* database for the example topic “**Discuss the impact of tobacco smoking in adolescents**” may look like this:

smok\*      or      tobacco      or      cigar\*  
and  
adolescen\* or      youth\*      or      “young people”  
and  
glasgow      or      scot\*

- You never get a perfect search first time – you will almost certainly have to go back and refine your searches by adding more keywords, or searching for additional concepts, or limiting your results further to reference type (e.g. review articles) or date of publication.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: you must never type the title of your assignment as a search on a database or the library catalogue. You may get few or no results with that strategy!**

---

## Step 2: Organise a system of recording references to material you will refer to in your work

---

**Step 3: Decide on the sources you want to search** to obtain information for your work and look up the search rules for these sources. Apply them to your search string.

Depending on your subject area you may want to follow a logical method of searching across a number of different sources:

**3.1. Primo** [<http://aulib.abdn.ac.uk/F>]. Use Advanced Keyword Search.

**3.2. E-book collections:**

**ebrary** [<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/aberdeenuniv>]

**ScienceDirect** [<http://www.sciencedirect.com>]

### 3.3. Databases containing journals:

1. Use **Find Databases** in Primo. Go to <http://primo.abdn.ac.uk:1701/> and login with your University computer username and password. Click on **Advanced Search** and then **Find Databases**. A tool for identifying databases relevant to your subject interest.

### 3.4. Internet search engines and subject gateways:

1. **Google** [<http://www.google.com>] Covers all subjects. Use Advanced Search.
2. **Google Scholar** [<http://scholar.google.com>] covers all subjects. Use Advanced Search.
3. **Scirus** [<http://www.scirus.com>] Covers science and technology.
4. **Intute** [<http://www.intute.ac.uk/>] Subject Gateway – covers all subjects.

Repeat your search across each one of these sources of information – evaluate what you find – go back and refine your search (you may need to add more concepts (ideas) or more keywords).

You never get a perfect search first time!

---

**Step 4: Manage your references – use RefWorks** to store references and generate bibliographies. As you do your searches, select and export references to your RefWorks account to store securely and use in your write-up.

1. Go to **RefWorks** at <http://www.refworks.com/refworks> to register an account
2. Once you have done your search you need to know how to export the records you wish to keep. Import instructions from all University of Aberdeen information databases to RefWorks are available online at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/documents/guides/rfw/importing.pdf>.

---

### Accessing databases when working from home or on the campus wireless network

When working on your personal computer at home or on your laptop in the wireless network on campus, there are 2 ways to access electronic databases purchased by the Library. You must set up your computer to use both routes because they enable you to identify yourself as a member of the University and therefore gain access to valuable resources.

**Route 1:** add the University's IP address to your own web browser to set up **proxy server access** (this makes it look as though you are working on campus on the University's network when you are at home). Set up instructions are available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/proxy/>

**Route 2:** login, using your University computer name and password, via **Shibboleth Login** (also known as UK Access Management Federation or Institutional Login); more information on this password protected system is available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/documents/guides/dbs/qgdb05.pdf>.

---

### Other important things to remember

**Copyright Law** protects the interests of authors and publishers and it is very strict in the United Kingdom. **Do not download or copy more than you are allowed by law.** Allowances for academic study and research are listed alongside every multi-functional device located in the University's libraries.

**Avoid plagiarism** by acknowledging properly the work of others (words, ideas, diagrams, charts, images, data etc.). Reference your sources in the citation style required by your School. The **Write-N-Cite** feature on RefWorks is very useful for formatting in-text citations and bibliographies automatically.

---

### Help and advice

- If you have any problems with accessing electronic databases please contact the IT Service Desk on tel.01224 273636 (also *Out of Hours Service* number) or email [Servicedesk@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:Servicedesk@abdn.ac.uk)
- Information Consultants can help with any subject specific difficulties, using databases and RefWorks. Their contact details are available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/support/contacts/ic/>
- Information Guides on databases and resources for some subjects and VodCasts (video-style demos) are available from the library web pages at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/support/guides/>
- Why don't you follow the Library on **Twitter**? We use this service to tell you about our new resources and databases and post notices on service disruption (including problems with accessing databases). To view the library *Tweets* (messages) go to <http://twitter.com/aberdeenunilib>
- Need to ask a quick question? We have an instant chat service – **Ask a Librarian** – which runs weekdays during term-time. You can send off your question via a chat box on the Library home page at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/>
- Want to attend more library skills workshops? Sign up at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/coursebooking/>