Library How-To:

Conduct a *basic search* in **Academic Search Complete**

Most library databases provide a way to easily search for articles and other sources using a simple ‘Google-like’ search box. This is known as ‘basic’ or ‘keyword’ searching. Using this method, you will need to give some thought to how broad or specific you should be with your choice of search terms. Additionally, in order to find sources that best meet the needs of your assignment, you will need to take steps to narrow your search.

**To make the best use of the ‘basic search’ feature, follow these simple steps:**

1. To begin, type your keywords into the search box and click ‘search’

![Search Results](image)

2. For most basic keywords your search will return far too many results for you to be able to accurately find sources relevant to specific aspects of your topic. Notice, below, that our search for ‘global warming’ returned over 100,000 results.
3. There are a few simple ways we can narrow our search. For one, since many college-level research assignments require the use of ‘peer reviewed’ or ‘scholarly’ sources, we can narrow our search to include only articles that meet that criteria. On the left side of the results page, go to the section that says ‘limit to’ and click on the checkbox for ‘Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals’ — for more info on the differences between ‘scholarly’ or ‘peer reviewed’ sources and popular sources, see this infographic.

By limiting our search to only ‘scholarly (peer reviewed) journals’ we eliminated almost half of our results!

62,890 results is still a lot to more than we need—and there are a few more ways for us to narrow our search.
4. Many college-level research assignments will also require you to find only recently published sources. (e.g. from the last ten years) Take a look at the ‘limit to’ section again. Notice the ‘Publication Date’ slider. For our topic, the oldest search result is from 1942!

Since global warming is a very current issue, we will want to use only the most recent scholarship. It is safe to assume that something written in 1942 is not going to work! In order to get only results published in the last ten (or so) years, we can drag the slider over until 2007 is the year that shows on the left side:

This simple action got rid of thousands of irrelevant articles:
5. Even though we have reduced our search results by more than half, we may find that our search was still too broad for our needs. In order to get more relevant results, we should be more specific with the search terms we use. This can be done by simply adding terms to the search box at the top of the results screen. Perhaps we want to focus more specifically on the causes of global warming.

![Search Example](image)

Adding just one keyword to our search got rid of another several thousand results:

![Search Results](image)

Since 28,237 articles is still a lot to go through, we may try adding even more keywords to zero in on a specific cause of global warming. Perhaps we want to search specifically for ‘human’ or ‘anthropogenic’ causes of global warming. For every search term you use, it helps to know a few alternate terms with the same meaning. This helps us to broaden and narrow our results depending on our needs.

**Things to keep in mind:**

- Basic searching will only get you so far. To learn how to employ a more accurate search strategy, see the how-to guide on Advanced Searching.
- *If at first you don’t succeed...* Searching for information is a process of trial and error. Remember that your first search will rarely lead to the best results.
- The more specific your search terms, the less results you will get.