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When scholars at any level are doing research, one step

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they usually take is searching for sources in library databases.

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A library database is like a container for the scholarly conversation.

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The articles that researchers publish are collected in databases,

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and assigned terms to describe what they're about.

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You can think of these as "expert terms."

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There's not just one database that houses the entire conversation.

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The library has many databases, and a lot of them

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are specific to different fields of study,

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so researchers will choose a database to search based on their subject area.

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In this video, you'll learn search strategies that you

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can apply across library databases.

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Let's take a look at how one database works, by helping

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Alan with his English 110 assignment.

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For his research paper, Alan wants to explore how social

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media influences political participation.

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He searched for his topic in the database,

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but he barely got any results and they don't look relevant.

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This is because he needs to be more strategic about

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the keywords he uses in his search.

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Databases will give you results when your keywords

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match some of: the words in the title,

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the expert terms used to describe the articles,

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or the words in the abstract.

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When you're first starting out with research, it's difficult

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to know what those terms will be--

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but there are two strategies Alan can use to do a more effective search.

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Strategy 1 is to develop a list of keywords to describe the

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topic and search for them in a variety of combinations.

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Thinking through synonyms for terms, as well

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as specific issues within your topic,

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can help you find the most relevant articles. In most databases,

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it helps to put multi-word phrases in quotation

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marks, and connect your terms using AND.

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If Alan wanted to focus on how younger voters use

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social media to participate in political discussions,

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he could try searching: "Young adults"

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and "elections" and "social media,"

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OR he could try Youth and Politics and Twitter.

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Even when you've developed strategic combinations of keywords

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that address the issues you want to investigate,

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you will still need to refine your terms, broadening

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or narrowing based on the results you get.

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For example, when Alan tried the keyword combination

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"young adults" and "elections" and "social media,"

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he got very few results. Some of these might be useful,

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but changing "social media" to the broader term "internet"

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gets him more results that are still relevant to the issue of how

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younger voters participate in political discussions

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using digital technology.

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There's a second strategy you can try once you've experimented with keywords.

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Choose an article that looks somewhat relevant to your topic

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and locate the list of expert terms used to describe it.

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"Political Communication" and "young adults - political activity"

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will both be useful for this topic.

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Alan can add a term to his keyword combination, or

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he can click on a term and get a new list of articles.

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Alan is off to a great start, since he's tried multiple

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searches using his own keywords and expert terms,

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but he's not done yet! Academic researchers usually

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try multiple databases to get the most relevant information.

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In the last section, you'll learn some strategies

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for choosing the best search tools for your topic

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and accessing the sources you find.