Search guide:

You should always search for scientific literature in a systematic way. The 7 steps of the Search Guide can help you structure your search.

Step 1: Defining your topic
Define your subject in the form of a question. Which aspects are important?
Limit your subject using one of the following limiters:
- time period
- language and region
- line of approach, perspective
- the types of publication needed:
  - general information: handbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, review articles
  - recent information: journal articles, newspapers, internet, statistics
  - specialized information: books, journal articles, conference materials, statistics

Step 2: Determining your search terms
Use terms from your research topic (step 1)
Brainstorm on every term: synonyms, related words, other languages, different spellings (Am. Eng)
Use reference materials: (specialized) encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks
Use the thesaurus of databases
Use subject terms and descriptions found in previously located articles
Who are the important authors in your field of study?

Step 3: Where to search
Books: SmartCat
Articles: SmartCat, general databases, specialized databases (see list on this handout)
Internet: websites of institutions, authors, Google Scholar etc.

Step 4: Actual searching
Record your searches! (See search hints)
Go from general explorative to specific searching
Combine search terms with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT)
Search specific fields (subject terms, title words, author)
Search in thesaurus (using official subject terms of databases)
Combine search history with new search terms
Check sources you have already found for new keywords and used literature

**Step 5: Getting hold of a publication**
Borrow, copy, reserve, download, print, e-mail
Use the Get it!-button to see if a title is available at the RUG library
ILL (Inter Library Loan): borrow from other libraries (see information on our website)

**Step 6: Evaluating your findings**
Are your sources reliable and scientific?
Be critical (see evaluating information on the last page of this handout)

**Step 7: Processing your literature**
Prevent plagiarism: citation + reference list
Cite according to citation guidelines prescribed by your teachers: APA, MLA, Chicago etc

**Literature databases**

Interesting databases for the various disciplines can be found in the [LibGuides]:

1. E.g. For Media studies the essential database is: **Communication & Mass Media Complete**

2. **General scientific databases:**
   - SmartCat (library search engine for RUG collections, but also nationwide and worldwide, includes non-scientific material)
   - Newspapers through Lexis Nexis newsportal and historical newspapers
   - Academic search premier: interdisciplinary database
   - Scopus
   - Web of Science
3. **Related areas**
   Each scientific area has its own databases, sometimes a subject overlaps with other areas:
   - Communication and Mass media complete
   - Literature Online
   - MLA: for American literature
   - Art Full Text & Art Index

**Want to use databases from home? You certainly can!**
Almost all library databases can be accessed from home. Open the database from the library website.
The database will ask you to login. Your login information is the same as the one you use for Nestor and ProgressWWW.
Your username is your student number starting with an ‘s’.

**Google Scholar** On google.scholar.com you can use Google to search for scientific literature. Please note that some full-text databases are closed to Google Scholar. From the university network you can use the Get it!-functionality automatically. At home, you can activate this service under ‘settings’, ‘library links’.

**LibGuide** The subject guides (LibGuides) will help you find the most important literature databases and other resources on a specific subject. For an overview of the available LibGuides, see: libguides.rug.nl.

**Search tips**

**Search strategy:**

I’m finding too much:
- Specify by using more search terms (AND)
- Use special search fields (for example title words, subject terms)
- Thesaurus terms + specific search terms
- Use limiters, for example limit by publishing year
- Use NOT to exclude terms

I’m finding too little:
• Use synonyms (combine with OR)
• Use official terms (found in a dictionary, thesaurus, handbook, encyclopedia)
• Use thesaurus terms in free search field
• Truncate: cognit* / child*
• Use subject term suggestions
• Look in reference lists of articles

Searching with subject terms: thesaurus
The official subject terms of a databases are listed in the thesaurus. Relations between terms are also included, for example broader, narrower and related terms. This is a good way to find all publications on a certain subject.

Example:

Make notes of your search process
Used literature should be cited in your essays. Always keep track of the sources you are using and where you found them. This will make it easier to find them again later. So write down:
• Which database you used + the search terms you used
• Information about the publication:
  - For a book: title, publication year and author
  - For an article: same as for a book + journal title, volume and page numbers
• Information about the availability: online or in which library library, note down request number
Tips:
- Shorten your search terms with an * (truncate). You can find all sources with words beginning with your search term, for example: child*, you find: child, children, childhood etc.
- Use “ “ when searching for an exact title or a phrase

Evaluating information, important criteria:
- **Authority**: who are the authors (official institute/personal), what is their background, is communication possible?
- **Current events**: how up-to-date is the site/how do you find out about this?
- **Objectivity**: what is the purpose of the site. Is it possibly biased, how does that influence the contents, is the author being honest about it, is that acceptable, are there sponsors, is the information general or specific?
- **Accuracy**: is the information complete, is the contents verifiable, are there references?
- **Specifically for websites**: what does the URL tell you (for example: gov= government, edu=education, com= commercial, ~name=usually personal, org=non-profit)?

Criteria for scientific publications
- The composition is systematic and based on previous research
- Used sources are cited and mentioned in a reference list
- The methods and conclusions are accurately described
- The use of language is unbiased and objective
- The publication has been critically evaluated by other scientists (peer review)