Database Tips and Tricks: Searching ERIC

Hello, and welcome to this tutorial on database searching in ERIC, the Education Resources Information Center.

Here on the library home page you will find a prominent search box which uses a search tool called Articles+. This searches across many databases at once. Searching using Articles+ is covered in another tutorial located in your course research guide.

Articles+ is a great tool, but it doesn't include all of the databases available through Rutgers, so there are times you may want to search within a specific database. To a particular database select "view all databases."

Databases are organized by subject, as well as being listed by title alphabetically. Clicking on social sciences will bring you several groups databases may find useful. A good place to start for bilingual education would be in the education group or perhaps in linguistics.

I'm going to select education. You can see here that ERIC is a major educational database. If you're logging in from off campus, you'll need to sign in with your Net ID and password.

When you enter the ERIC database, you begin in advanced search mode. Here you can search within particular fields and limit your search results to those that are peer reviewed or from a particular time period. It is not a good idea to limit results to full text because even if an article is not available in full text from the ERIC database, it may still be available in another Rutgers database.

The advanced search feature allows you to combine search terms in these boxes to broaden or narrow your search. Please note that putting a phrase in quotation marks allows you to search for that specific phrase.

Search terms can be combined in several ways. Connecting two search terms with "AND" narrows your search because it only retrieves results containing both search terms. For example, if you are researching the topic of mathematics in bilingual education, you should use "AND" to connect those terms.

Another way to combine search terms to use "OR." This will broaden your search, since it retrieves results which include either search term. Try to think of keywords that are related to your original search term to cast a wider net.

You may want to try something like searching for bilingual education OR bilingual students. If you were looking to eliminate a search term from your results, you can use "NOT." In this case, searching for bilingual education NOT higher education will exclude results about college students.

Let's try an example to see how combining search terms works in ERIC. Let's combine the terms bilingual education AND mathematics. On the left hand side of the results page, you'll see that you can limit your results to peer reviewed, by date, or by source type. You can also limit by subject. It's helpful to take a
look at these subjects when you're first exploring your topic. In this case let's limit the results to peer reviewed and since 2004.

Since we only have 43 results, let's see if we can expand our search by adding OR. In the top box, we'll add OR bilingual students.

Now I can see we have 68 results. Let's practice excluding results by adding the term higher education and combining it with NOT. We can see here that now we're down to 63 results since we've eliminated those that are about higher education.

ERIC (and most other databases) has a handy feature known as a thesaurus. A thesaurus is a listing of descriptors, or subject terms. These descriptors provide what is called a "controlled vocabulary." In other words, the producers of the database decide on a particular set of terms that will describe the content of the database.

The controlled nature of a thesaurus gives you more precise results and can help you develop your search terms. Let's take a closer look at the ERIC thesaurus. You get to the thesaurus by clicking on the link in the upper left.

Here at the ERIC thesaurus you'll find a search box where you can enter your term and browse. Let's enter bilingual education. Let's click "Browse."

Bilingual Education is displayed here in blue as a clickable link. That means that this is the correct term as used in ERIC. Look down a bit further and you'll see that Bilingual Immersion Programs is written in black. That means that this is not an accepted subject term in ERIC and you should search for Immersion Programs instead.

If we click on Bilingual Education, we'll find the definition of the term as it's used in ERIC and we'll also see the broader term Education, as well as some related terms. Looking to these related terms may help you develop your topic, and it's also a way to create a more effective search strategy, since you're viewing the accepted terms within this database.

Let's select Bilingual Education and some related terms, such as Bilingual Education Programs, Bilingual Instructional Materials, and Bilingual Students. Let's add this to our search by using OR. You can see the box where search string is being built. The DE stands for descriptor. When use a term as a descriptor, the results will be specifically about that topic rather than results that just contain the term somewhere within the article. The thesaurus may also inspire some ideas when you're beginning your research. For example, if we replace bilingual education with mathematics and then select the term mathematics, we can browse through and see some broader terms or some narrower terms as well. And then we have related terms down towards the bottom.

Looking through these terms may inspire some ideas. Let's look through the related terms and see if we find anything interesting. How about Word Problems? Let's add Word Problems to our search. this time we'll add it to our search string using AND. You can see it's been added up here, and now we can hit "Search."
Here we have a few fairly specific results. Let's also be sure to check peer reviewed. We can scroll through the results and see if anything sounds interesting. I'm going to select this second article here: Cognitive benefits and costs of bilingualism in elementary school students.

When we click on the link it brings us to information about the article, including the author, the journal title, some descriptors, and the abstract. If a full text version were available through ERIC, we would see the link to get the PDF here. There's no link here for the full text though. That means that this article is not available in full text through ERIC. No worries though, because we have the "Get it @ R" button right here.

Clicking on "Get it @ R" has transported us to another database where we can download the PDF. This doesn't always happen. Sometimes Rutgers simply doesn't have access to a particular article. But that doesn't mean that you should give up. Rutgers is a research institution with great libraries, and if we don't have something, we can almost always still get it for you. Check out the additional videos in your course research guide to find out how to get an article through our interlibrary loan and article delivery service.

I want to cover one last method for finding articles. Sometimes all you need to get started is one article that very closely relates to your topic. If you're lucky enough to find an article like this, a great strategy is to do something called "chasing the citations."

Chasing citations is a great way to uncover relevant articles by tracking down other articles that cite or are cited by an article that you already have. Chasing citations backward is simply examining the references listed at the back of the article. This can help you uncover seminal works as well as other relevant literature. Chasing citations forward is useful for uncovering newer articles that cite the article on hand, so it's used to find more recent research. An easy way to do this is by using Google Scholar.

Let me quickly demonstrate how to use Google scholar to chase citations forward. Google Scholar is a free resource that you can access from any browser at scholar.google.com, but it's important that you take time to log in through our library. That's because Google Scholar frequently doesn't have access to the full text versions of articles. If the log in from our library, you'll be able to access many more of the full text articles, since they're located in other Rutgers databases.

Let's go back and log in just like we did when logging into ERIC. Here at the library homepage we again start with "view all databases." This time we'll go alphabetically by title since we know the name of the database. Here we have the G's and we can click on Google Scholar. If you're logging in from off campus, you'll need to connect using your Net ID and password.

Now we're at Google Scholar and we can type in the name of our article. Click search. Now are at the page for article. You can see it lists the title, also the abstract, and here on the lower left you see "cited by 24." That means that there are 24 other articles in Google Scholar that have cited this one. If you click
on that, it will take us to a page with all of the articles that have cited our article. You can see the names of articles on the left and on the right are links to the full text versions.

Let's check for full text for this one: When language of instruction and language of application differ. Since Rutgers has access to a database that contains this article, we've been transported to that database where we can download the PDF for free.

By comparison, let me show you the same search, but not logged in through the Rutgers library. We've entered our title into the search box here and this brings us to the same main page about our article. Let's click "cited by 24" again. Here we see the 24 articles that have cited our article, but there are many less links to full text. If we try to get the same article that we just found in a Rutgers database, it does take us to the article, but since we're not logged in through Rutgers, now the only way to get the article is to purchase it. And it costs $36.00. This is why it's a good idea to always log in through the Rutgers library site before you go to Google Scholar.

Thank you for watching this tutorial on database searching in ERIC. I have one final tip for you: if you're ever in need of help, remember that Rutgers librarians are here to help you. And we're happy to do it! you can contact us at any time from the library homepage. You can reach us by phone, e-mail, and sometimes even chat. We're also available in person at the reference desk. Please let us know if there's anything we can help you with, and best of luck with your research!