

Database search tips for English Literature and Creative Writing

1. Planning your search

This [Search Plan for English Literature](#) (Google doc) can help you develop a list of keywords to use when searching online. Click on File - Make a copy - to save your own copy and then add your own notes to it.

2. How do I search a database?

[Browse a list of key databases for English Literature and Creative Writing students here](#)

Searching with AND

Databases work in a different way to Google and the LibrarySearch. You'll often see on databases that they have several search boxes linked by **AND**.

You need to type separate keywords or phrases into each search box, for example:

Titus Andronicus AND body

gothic AND fiction

This will find references containing both terms.

Add in additional keywords to focus your search – each new word/phrase will narrow down your search e.g. gothic AND fiction AND Europe

Experiment with alternative terms - you may find more results e.g.

gothic AND novel AND Europe

Example search on JSTOR database (Advanced search):



Advanced Search

Browse ▾

Tools ▾

Advanced Search [Search Help](#)

Keyword

titus andronicus

All fields ▾

Second Keyword

AND ▾

body

All fields ▾

Add a search box

Searching with OR

You can use **OR** to search for alternative terms and broaden your search, e.g.

novel OR fiction

sons OR fathers OR family OR patriarchy

Example search on MLA International Bibliography database:



The screenshot shows the EBSCOhost search interface. At the top left is the EBSCOhost logo. The search bar contains the text 'titus andronicus'. To the right of the search bar is a dropdown menu labeled 'Select a Field (optional)'. To the right of the search bar is a pink 'Search' button. Below the search bar is a dropdown menu labeled 'AND' and a search box containing the text 'sons OR fathers OR family OR patriarchy'. To the right of this search box is another dropdown menu labeled 'Select a Field (optional)'. To the right of this search box is a 'Clear ?' button. Below this search box is another dropdown menu labeled 'AND' and an empty search box. To the right of this search box is a third dropdown menu labeled 'Select a Field (optional)'. To the right of this search box are '+' and '-' buttons. At the bottom of the search interface are links for 'Basic Search', 'Advanced Search', and 'Search History'.

Phrase searching

Put phrases and the titles of literary works in quotation marks if you want to make sure the words are only found together (and not separately), e.g. “Lyrical Ballads”; “Winter’s Tale”; “modernist poetry”.

Don't forget differences in American spellings e.g. theatre/theater

Wildcard symbols

- Use the truncation symbol * added to the root of a word to search for alternative endings, e.g. Romantic* will not only find Romantic, but also Romantics, Romanticism etc.
- Use the ? symbol to replace a character in a word e.g. wom?n will find references that contain both woman and women.

Sorting and refining your results

Databases such as JSTOR and MLA International Bibliography allow you to sort results by date or relevance. You will probably find that sorting results by relevance is more helpful.

Look for options to focus your search. These can include:

- Limiting your search to material published in English.
- Narrowing your results by date if that's appropriate.
- Focusing on specific kinds of sources e.g. scholarly peer-reviewed articles, chapters in books.

3. Further help

- If you would like further help, please contact the Academic Liaison Librarian for English Literature, Joanna Cooksey by emailing jcooksey@brookes.ac.uk
- Check the **Course resource help for English Literature and Creative Writing** at: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/resources-and-services/course-resource-help/english-literature-and-creative-writing> for links to key-e-resources, guides and much more.

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