Searching Scopus

Scopus provides records of articles from thousands of peer-reviewed journals (and other types of document) covering a wide range of subjects (social and policy sciences, health, medicine, sport, management, biology, chemistry, physics, architecture, engineering). Many of Scopus’s search results will include links to full documents. The purpose of this guide is to help you search Scopus effectively - many of the principles covered will also help you search other databases.

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1. How to use this guide: don’t skip this section!

Most of the examples in this guide are based on the following assignment title: “Investigate the extent to which rates of attendance impact upon academic achievement by undergraduates”.

Work through the whole of this guide. In each section, note the instructions and examples given, and try a search of Scopus following the same instructions. However, when searching Scopus, use one of your own assignments (or research questions) to help you select your own search terms (rather than using the examples in this guide).

First year SPS students taking SP10159 workshops: use the theme of the article by Roberts and Ravn to help you select your own search terms (you will be using this article as the basis of your November assignment).
2. **Accessing Scopus**

a. You need to access Scopus via the Library website to get full access. Along with most other library resources, it is best to use the browser, Google Chrome, to access Scopus. Go the Library homepage: [https://library.bath.ac.uk/home](https://library.bath.ac.uk/home) - then, click the link for your subject within the “Subject Resources” section.

This will take you to your subject’s library webpages where you will find a link to Scopus in ‘Search the Literature’. Alternatively, search for Scopus via the Library Catalogue.
3. Selecting your search terms

Think carefully about your search terms before entering them. This will help the database return a stronger set of relevant search results.

3a. Identifying sub-themes

To select your search terms, identify the key words or phrases within your assignment title/theme (or research question). Consider which words/phrases distinguish your title/theme from any other one. If you identify multiple key terms, each of these represents a ‘sub-theme’ within the overall theme of your assignment.

For example, the following are the three ‘sub-themes’ drawn from the assignment title, “Investigate the extent to which rates of attendance impact upon academic achievement by undergraduates”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undergraduates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3b. Identifying alternative words or phrases

Think about the potential range of alternative words and phrases that could be used to describe each separate sub-theme. Consider terminology that you already know from academic books, journal articles, lectures and tutorials, and commonly-used language.
**Why do this?** This will help you decide which words to enter into Scopus’ search boxes.

ii. Also, if you enter a large range of relevant search terms, you are more likely to increase the number of useful search results. **Useful tip:** You might find it helpful to write down your alternative words/phrases in separately themed rows e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Alternative words/phrases</th>
<th>Any others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>attendance</td>
<td>absteentism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achievement</td>
<td>attainment, grades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undergraduate</td>
<td>student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Entering your search terms**

4a. Create multiple search boxes:

Click ‘+ add search Field’ underneath the search box.

In order to create multiple search boxes - you need one box for each of your sub-themes.
4b. Organising and entering your search terms

Enter each set of search terms (i.e. each sub-theme) into its own separate search box. Enter the word or between each alternative word/phrase. For an explanation of the asterisk*, refer to section 3C of this guide. Here is an example of a set of organised search terms in Scopus.

In the above example, note the following:

- The default AND appears between search boxes. This means that at least one word/phrase from each search box will appear in each of your results.
- You have the option to limit your results to a specific date range. This is not appropriate for all searches (some older articles may still be relevant or frequently cited).

4c. Useful search tips!

**Truncating words using an asterisk** *

As in the examples above, try using an asterisk where relevant – this might help increase your number of search results. You can add this at the end of the stem of a word to find variations e.g.

- attend* searches for attend, attends, attending, attended, attendance etc.
- absen* searches for absence, absences, absent, absentee, absentees, absenteeism

**Searching for a specific phrase**

You can enter “speech marks” around a phrase so that Scopus searches for only those words in exactly the same order e.g. “university student*”. “student at university”
4d. Click the search button (the magnifying glass icon).

Take a look at the number of your search results. Scroll down to the ‘subject area’ options in the left-hand column (left of the results). If you are retrieving many irrelevant search results, you can refine your results by selecting filters in the left-hand column (e.g. refine by ‘social sciences’). Click a subject filter and then take another look at the number of your search results.

5. **Re-sorting and refining your results**

5a. Re-sorting your results

If your results appear in date order, re-sort them so that they appear starting with the most relevant. You can also re-sort them in order of those that are most highly cited. The “sort on” options appear just above your search results and to the right.

5b. Using “limit” options

Experiment with ticking/selecting some options in the left-hand column to refine your results – for example, you could limit your results by selecting/ticking keyword(s) and clicking the ‘limit to’ button - this appears at both the top and bottom of the column.

**Note both the ‘view less/more’ and ‘view all’ links in the keywords menu.**
5c. Retrieving too few results?

Click the orange ‘Scopus’ logo (top left-hand corner) to return to your search terms. Consider whether any further terms exist on your topic and if so, add these to the relevant search boxes (again entering the word or in between multiple terms). Try another search. If you still retrieve few results, search more broadly on the topic. You could so this by identifying the least significant of the sub-themes and excluding the associated search terms from your next search.

5d. Retrieving too many irrelevant results?

Click the orange ‘Scopus’ logo (top left-hand corner) to return to your search terms. Consider whether any of your search terms are of only marginal relevance – if so, remove these and try another search. If you continue to retrieve many irrelevant results, consider whether your topic contains a further sub-theme. If so, enter the search term(s) associated with that sub-theme in a further search box.

5e. Proximity searching (an optional step but this can prove useful)

Proximity searching is useful where multiple similar variations on a single phrase exist e.g. “social work training” “training of social workers” “teaching social work”…

By entering a search term followed by W/ and a number, you can search for two search terms to appear near each other e.g. within 5 words of each other. Place any alternative terms in brackets.

“social work** W/5 (train* OR teach*)

If relevant to your topic, undertake a “proximity search” by adapting your search terms (as in the above example) and note down the number of results retrieved……

6. Engaging with abstracts (summaries)

If you hover just to the right of the “links” button, you will see an option to “show abstract” – click on this to view a summary/abstract of the relevant document i.e. findings and methodologies.

Note the terminology used in abstracts. By developing your awareness of relevant terminology, this may help you modify/expanding your search terms. In turn, this will potentially help you retrieve a greater number of relevant results. If you click on an article title within your results, you may also find author key words and subject terms listed – these describe the content of the article and may inspire you to modify your own terms.
7. **Accessing the full article**

6a. **Checking online availability**

To find out whether or not the full text of an article is available for you to read, click the blue and white ‘Links’ button:

![links]

This button will take you to a “links” page which will provide a link to the full article or at least the journal website (e.g. if the library subscribes to the relevant journal).

6b. **If the full article is NOT available online:**

Search the Library Catalogue via the Library homepage: https://library.bath.ac.uk/home - Search for the journal title (not the article title). If we provide the journal and its Catalogue record states ‘copies available’, we provide a print copy (click ‘copies available’ to find out if we hold the relevant issue).

**If we do not provide the article in any format,** and it is potentially important for your work, please contact your Subject Librarian for advice.

8. **Broadening your perspective on a topic**

“**Cited by**” links and references

**Back to your search results:** Note the words times cited to the right of each result. This tells you the number of times an individual article has been cited/referenced by other articles (i.e. those that have been indexed by Scopus). You can click on this to find details of those other articles.

It is good practice to consider using such articles to support/extend/challenge your argument. They may help you demonstrate a broader understanding of the topic, providing you with a more up-to-date perspective.

For similar reasons, it is also good practice, where relevant, to follow-up an individual article’s own references i.e. use previous articles related to the same topic.
9. **Saving and emailing results**

   ![Image](image.png)

   a. **It is good practice** to save multiple copies of selected results so that you have “back-ups” in the event of losing them. To save them, first **Click the box next to each individual result** of interest.

   b. **Email the selected results** to yourself: select the **envelope icon**. A short online form will appear. Complete the form (e.g. enter your email address and click **Send**).

   c. **Other export options**: select the **Export** option just above your search results. A dialog box will appear where you find various options for saving your results. For example:

   - **Save the results to a folder** of your choice: select **Text format** and click the blue Export button. The references will appear as a separate file for you save. If the results open up in a separate window, you may need to copy and paste them into a Word document - then save that document.
   - **Saving to EndNote**: select **RIS format** and click the blue Export button to create a file. If you use EndNote Desktop, the results will be imported immediately into your EndNote library. If you use EndNote Online, you need to save the file and import into EndNote Online - here are the instructions: [https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/how-to-use-endnote-online-library-guides-part-2-downloading-database-references/#scopus](https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/how-to-use-endnote-online-library-guides-part-2-downloading-database-references/#scopus)

   **Try also searching further library databases (e.g. IBSS)**. No single database provides details of all articles written on a topic. If you would like any further support in using this database, please contact your Subject Librarian.

   

   *Peter Bradley, 23/10/2019*