

The Basics

This tutorial will provide you with a quick understanding of how to use the EBSCOhost database. BCC subscribes to many different databases, and nearly all of them function the same way. I'll be using EBSCOhost as an example, but the skills you learn here will work with the other databases we subscribe to as well.

So you may be wondering "what is a database?" A database is simply a large computer file of information that is highly organized and structured. Because it is so organized, it makes searching in different ways possible. Most of the databases that we subscribe to here at BCC contain periodical articles: articles from magazines, newspapers and scholarly journals. Please keep in mind that the information that you find in a database is significantly different than information that you find on the web using a search engine like Google. The articles that you find in the database have been published in print, and have gone through a more rigorous editorial process. Database articles are generally more authoritative and reliable than information that you find on the web.

To get to the databases, you first need to get to the BCC Library homepage. If you go to Google and search for EBSCOhost, you won't be able to access the information! Here on the main page you will see a link for "Periodicals/Databases." There are also quick links on the main page for EBSCOhost and ProQuest, are two largest databases. You can either directly go in to EBSCOhost from the main page or click on the Periodicals link and select from our master list of databases.

EBSCOhost is such a large database that it divides its articles into sections by subject area. For most classes, Academic Search Complete will have good information. Depending on what you are studying, some of the other subject areas might be useful. For example, if you are taking a business class, you'd want to choose Business Source Complete. ERIC is a database with articles relating to education. Make sure you take a look at the different options!

This now takes you to the basic search screen. I like to use basic search, but there is also an advanced search option. The main difference between basic and advanced search is that in advanced search you can limit where the database looks for your search words. You could limit to articles with "insomnia" in the title of the article or something like that. I actually like to start with the basic search and then move to advanced search if I find that to be necessary.

Now, when you are searching, how you type in your search is really important! If you type in a long phrase such as "treatment of insomnia in students," you won't find very many articles. This is because the database is looking for that exact phrase. Instead, try to think of keywords. The keywords in this example would be "treatment," "insomnia," and "students." I'm going to type those in the search box and connect them with "AND."

treatment AND insomnia AND students

AND is a connecting term that we use in searching. What we are asking for is that all of these search words show up in the articles we find. I'll talk more about other search techniques and connecting terms in later sections of this tutorial.

I've typed my search into the box, but before I hit the search button, there's another feature that you should notice. Below the search box there are ways to limit your results, and this is a great feature. You can limit by date, you can limit to scholarly journals. The limits I use most frequently are BCC holdings and the Full-text limit. BCC holding are things that the BCC Library owns in print. Full-text articles are articles where you can read the entire article on the computer screen. This is a fabulous option if you are off campus. I'm going to limit to Full-text articles.

My search found 11 full-text articles. They are arranged chronologically, with the most recent article at the top. This is different that how web search engines like Google arrange information; they put the most relevant information at the top. With the databases, it is important that you don't fall into the trap of using the first 5 articles. They aren't necessarily the best articles for your research.

The results page gives you a summary of each article, author names, where it was published, etc. For more complete information, click on the article title and that takes you to the complete record for the article. I'm going to select article #4 which is titled Development and Evaluation of the Sleep Treatment and Education Program for Students.

Here's the complete record for this item. At the top you'll find information about the author and where this article was originally published. This was published in the Journal of American College Health in early 2006. This information at the top of the record is what you'll need for a bibliography if you were to use this article as part of your research. Below that are subjects, which are main keywords that are used in this article. Look at the subjects and you may discover other useful search words that you can use in later searches. You'll notice for this article that sleep deprivation is one of the subjects, so that would likely be good vocabulary to use in a future search. There's an abstract of summary of the article and then at the very bottom of the screen you'll see the PDF full-text button. I'm going to click on that and I'll be able to read the entire article on the computer screen.

This article is 7 pages long and is a scholarly journal article showing empirical research. (Basically they are testing a hypothesis and writing about their experiment and what results they came up with.) You can read this right on the screen, but when you are gathering resources for a research project, it's a good idea to email the articles to yourself. When you email articles to yourself, you can gather all potentially useful articles together in one place. It keeps you organized. You'll also have all of the information that you need for your bibliography when it comes time to put that together. Click on the email button and you can send the entire full-text article to yourself.

That's the basics of how to use the EBSCOhost database or most of the other BCC databases. If you have any questions, please contact the library. Our email address and phone number are at the beginning of this tutorial.