PsycINFO: Planning and Conducting Effective Searches

PsycINFO indexes and summarizes journal articles, book chapters, books, dissertations, and technical reports in psychology and related disciplines from 1806 to the present. PsycINFO is produced by the American Psychological Association and is searchable through the ERL WebSPIRS software developed by the SilverPlatter company.

To search PsycINFO, use the Internet to connect to the Rod Library's Home Page (http://www.library.uni.edu/). Click on Databases A-Z. On the Journal and Magazine Articles & More--Databases A-Z page scroll down to PsycINFO and click on the word PsycINFO to enter PsycINFO directly. (Or from the Rod Library Home Page you may click on Find Database, click on P, scroll down to PsycInfo (SilverPlatter), and click on PsycINFO(SilverPlatter).)

Sample Search: What recent research has been published on the differences between male and female gamblers and the use of alcohol?

Planning Step 1. Develop a concise expression of your search topic:

What research has been published since 2001 on gender differences, gambling, and alcohol?

Planning Step 2. Identify the search topic's separate concepts:

gender differences AND gambling AND alcohol

Planning Step 3. Develop word lists for each concept, preferably from the Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms which lists and defines the descriptors, or subject headings, used by PsycINFO to describe the topic of each publication. Click on the Thesaurus tab near the top of the screen to access the Thesaurus. (To return to searching, click on the Search tab.) A paper copy of the Thesaurus is available in the Index/Abstract area at BF 1 P6523.

human sex differences
gender differences
gambling
gamblers
poker
slot machines
alcohol
alcohol abuse
alcoholism

Planning Step 4. Use appropriate logical connectors such as OR and AND.

To conduct a PsycINFO search for material on this topic, access PsycINFO using the procedures above.

1. We are interested in the most recent research. To limit your search to material published during the most recent years, use the Limit Search To box in the upper right of the screen. Click in the box in front of Publication Year greater than 2001. Records for resources published from 2002 to the present will be retrieved until you clear this limit. (For additional ways to limit your search to material published during a particular time period, see the Limiting by Publication Date section on page 3 of this handout.)
2. When you access PsycINFO, a search screen with one search window appears. For most searches, especially for searches using several words or phrases, we recommend using the Advanced search mode since it offers several search windows. Access the Advanced search mode by clicking on the Advanced tab near the top of the screen. The Advanced screen with several Terms windows appears.

3. In the first Terms window type human sex difference* or gender difference*.
   
   When an * is typed after a word stem, the system searches for words beginning with the letters you have typed. In this example, records for publications about one human sex difference or gender difference as well as many differences will be retrieved.
   
   Use the OR connector to combine related terms for the same concept—to retrieve either human sex difference* or gender difference*. Be sure the in window displays the choice (Terms anywhere) so the system retrieves the record for a publication if your terms appear anywhere in the record. Also check to be sure that the AND choice is selected (the bullet will be darkened).

4. When deciding what terms to search with, we can use the Thesaurus to identify appropriate terms for our concepts and we may also try commonly used words, such as poet even if it is not a thesaurus term.

   In the second Terms window, enter terms for the second concept by typing gambler* or poker* or slot machine*.
   
   Type the * after gambler to retrieve gambler or gamblers as well as gambling; after poker to retrieve poker or poker’s; and after slot machine to retrieve slot machine or slot machines. Be sure the in window displays the choice (Terms anywhere) and that the AND choice is selected.

5. In the third Terms window on the next line, type alcohol*. Alcohol* will retrieve alcohol, alcohol abuse, alcohol drinking attitudes, alcohol drinking patterns, alcoholic, alcoholics, or alcoholism. Again, be sure the in window displays the choice (Terms anywhere) and that the AND choice is selected.

6. Click on the Search button. You will retrieve a list of references, or records, in which either human sex difference* or gender difference* appears with either gambler* or poker* or slot machine* and with alcohol*.
   
   The AND command instructs the system to look for results in which all three concepts appear. Our results should be about our topic, gender differences, gambling, and alcohol consumption.

7. In the lower portion of the screen your search results are displayed. The PsycINFO record is displayed which provides the bibliographic citation, abstract, major descriptors, and minor descriptors for each publication. To scroll down through the results, use the scroll bar or the down arrow button on the far right. After viewing several records, you may wish to go back up to an earlier record. To do so, use the scroll bar or the up arrow button.

8. Near the end of each PsycINFO record there is a Find it button. Click the Find it button to learn whether Rod Library provides access to the publication (journal article, book, etc.) full text in electronic form, owns the publication in paper copy, or does not provide access. After you click a new window will open with a list of options such as:
   
   Full text—follow the database link(s) to determine whether the article or other publication is available full text online and to retrieve it
   
   Holding information—to determine whether the resource is available in paper copy at Rod Library, search the Library’s catalog (UNISTAR) by clicking on Library Catalog (UNISTAR).

   To return to your PsycINFO search, click the x in the upper right corner of the window’s screen.

9. As you review records on the screen, you may mark them for later printing. Notice on the left side of the screen that a small white box is in front of each record number. Click in the box next to the number of each record you wish to mark. A checkmark will appear in the box, indicating that you have marked the record.

10. To print records you have marked, click on the (Print) button which is halfway down the screen, on the right side in the blue Display section. The Print Options screen will appear. In the Records to be printed section, verify that the Marked Records Only button is selected. Click the Print button near the top of the screen. You will retrieve another window; review the options given and click on Print. After your results have been printed, the system will redisplay your search results.

   If you wish to review more of your search results, you may continue scrolling down your results. If you wish to try additional searches, you may enter your search terms in the Terms search windows in the top half of the screen.
Improving Your Search

Too Many Results?

Are you retrieving too many results? You may wish to try focusing your research on a particular aspect of gambling such as pathological gambling.

Click on the Advanced search tab near the top of the screen and enter your search in the Terms search windows. In the first Terms window type human sex difference* or gender difference*. To focus your results on pathological gamblers, type pathological gamb* in the second Terms window. In the third window, type alcohol* and click on the Search button. Explore your results.

Too Few Results?

What if you are getting too few results? Several strategies could be used to broaden your search. Here are three options:

(a) Try less restrictive terms. For example, you could include terms describing aspects of gambling behavior which are broader in scope than gambl*, such as risk taking or the even more encompassing risk*.

(b) Try terms conceptually related to your search focus. For example, you could broaden your search by including research focused primarily on each gender by using either females or males in addition to the comparative human sex differences or gender differences. You could use one or more of these terms and evaluate your search results.

(c) Broaden your search to encompass more years if you have set a publication date limit. You could remove the publication date limit by clearing it or you could change it to include more years. (See the next section on customizing the publication date limit.)

Limiting by Publication Date: Customizing the publication date limit.

To customize a publication date limit—that is, to limit your search to material published during particular years—click on the More button in the Limit Search To: box in the upper right of the screen. The screen indicating the various limit options appears with Frequently Used Limits given on the left. To limit your search to material published during particular years, click on Publication Year. Enter the specific years you wish. For example, if you wish to search for materials published from 1997 to the present, enter 1997 in the first box, and the current year in the second. To activate this limit, click on the OK button near the top of the screen. Searches will be limited to material published from 1997 to the present unless (or until) this limit is cleared. (Note: if you had previously used any publication year limit, such as Publication Year greater than 2001, you must clear it first by clicking on the Clear button. All of your limits will be cleared. You may then follow the procedures above to customize the publication date limit and any other limits you wish to set.)

To limit your searches to material published during the most recent five years, checkmark Publication Year greater than 2001 in the Search Limits box as explained in search step 1 of this handout.

Searching by Age of Population Studied--Age Group Field: Focus search on studies of adolescents.

For search topics involving human populations of a particular age, you will retrieve the most comprehensive search results if you use the appropriate Age Group term. When the publication being indexed specifies the age of the human population studied, PsycINFO indexers enter one or several of the 20 age group values in the Age Group field of the PsycINFO record for that publication. Examples of PsycINFO age group terms are infancy, school age, adolescence, and adulthood.

To most easily focus your searches on a particular age group term, click on the Index tab near the top of the search screen. You are prompted to choose an Index to search. General Index is normally displayed. Change the selection to Age Group by clicking on the drop-down menu arrow and selecting AGE GROUP (AG). The 20 age group terms will appear. These are the age-related terms used by the PsycINFO indexers. To search for records with the age term(s) of interest, click on the box(es) in front of the appropriate term(s) so a checkmark appears. Then click on Search Marked.

To combine these results with your previous results, use the Search History feature. Click on the Search History tab. In the lower half of the screen the number of records retrieved with the age group(s) you’ve entered will be displayed. Your previous search statements are also displayed with the corresponding number of records each search retrieved. You can combine the age group(s) with a previous search by clicking in the box given before each desired search statement. Then, look for the Combine and search using prompt near the middle of the screen. To focus the search on studies examining gender differences among adolescents who gamble and drink alcohol, use the and button.
If you wish, you may also search with other age-related words. For example, in addition to using the age group term *adolescence* you may also wish to search with words such as juveniles, teenagers, or adolescent. For comprehensive results, you do need to include the appropriate age group term. (Note: Typing the age group term as a keyword in the Terms window will not search the age group field.)

**Searching for Works by a Particular Author, Using the Index Method:** Find articles by Sandra L. Bem.

Index searching allows you to view, select, and search words and hyphenated phrases from an alphabetical display. The Index option may be used to search in the General Index (which includes subject terms) and in additional indexes including author name, journal name, age group, or population characteristic (for example, female).

1. Click on the Index tab near the top of the screen. You will retrieve a screen with an Index selection window. Normally PsycINFO would search in the General Index. Since Sandra L. Bem is an author, we wish to search in the **Browsable Author Index (AUI)**. (Note: Before conducting this search example, clear any publication date limits you have set by clicking on the Clear button in the Search Limits box.)

2. Click on the down arrow to the right of the Index window near the center of the screen. You will retrieve a drop-down menu of indexes. For author searching, choose the **BROWSABLE AUTHOR INDEX (AUI)** by clicking on the **BROWSABLE AUTHOR INDEX (AUI)** line so this option appears in the Index to search window.

3. Type **Bem, Sandra** in the Term window. Click on the **Go to Term** button.

4. You will retrieve an alphabetical display of authors. Notice that Sandra L. Bem appears to publish under both Sandra L. Bem and Sandra Lipsitz Bem. To retrieve records for publications in which she used either form of name, click in the box to the left of **Bem-Sandra-L.** and in the box to the left of **Bem-Sandra-Lipsitz.**

5. Click on the **Search Marked** button. You will retrieve the records for publications authored by Sandra L. Bem or Sandra Lipsitz Bem. It does appear that the publications are by the same author, since they are about similar topics. If you wish to mark and print any of the records, follow steps given above.

When you are finished searching, please log off by clicking **Logout** in the upper right hand corner of the PsycINFO screen.

To access search tips and guides developed by the American Psychological Association, access http://www.apa.org/psycinfo/training through the Internet.

For additional assistance, please consult a reference librarian or click on the Help button or consult the How do I? . . . window in the upper right of the PsycINFO screen.

Barb Weeg
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