The goal of this presentation is to demonstrate the importance of using four steps in an online database search. Keep in mind that only part of a scholarly article or academic book might help answer a research question.

[If you would like to pause the presentation or replay part of it, move your cursor over the viewing screen to make the Pause button and the Play Marker appear.]

To search effectively in an online database, begin with the main concepts in the research question.

Our example is, How does scholarly literature describe the paradox or tension between saint and sinner.

The two main concepts are saint and sinner.

Secondly, use synonyms, subject terms, or related terms.

Think of how a scholarly author would approach the main concepts – what terms could serve as synonyms or related terms.

Refer to a reference book such as Christian Cyclopedia Online.

For example: saint → saints, church, believers, justification, grace, communion of saints
sinner → sin, transgress, trespass

We will use the theology database ATLAS for our example.

Use the ATLAS Help button in the upper right hand corner -- it leads to tutorials and explanations of database features.

We can search for subject terms in the Subject Terms index.

By using subject terms we can retrieve more relevant results since all article contents are represented by one or more subject term.

We can also find broader, narrower, or related subject terms.

After gathering subject terms, we can do an Advanced search.

The third search step is, use operators such as and, or, not, parentheses also called nesting, field searching, truncation, wildcard, phrase searching, or other database features.

In our example, we can either search for articles containing both concepts, or search for those containing only one.

To search for articles containing both of the research question’s main concepts, nest together the first main concept terms using or, using truncation, nest together the second main concept terms using or, and then use the and operator to search for records containing both main concepts. [ti (church or belief or believer? or justif* or grac* or communion of saints) and ti (sin* or transgress* or trespass*) not pt review]

This search yields about _____ results. The shorthand notation describing it is called a search statement.

The final search technique is, interact with the search results and modify the search statement to improve results.

Since we don’t expect to find the best results with only one search, always be ready to modify the search in order to improve the quality of the results (quality refers to criteria such as the currency, authority, accuracy, audience and point of view).

Look for relevant results to discover more main concept synonyms or subject terms.

ATLAS also lists subject terms in the left margin.

At any time we can refine our search by clicking on Show more.

ATLAS allows us to limit results to scholarly articles.

This search limited to scholarly articles yields about _____ results. Notice you can Save your search by copying the persistent link or by creating a free account.

[Hover the cursor over the Magnifying glass icon to view the record and its abstract if available.]

Click on the article title to view the full record.

Click the Cite this article icon to see examples of how to cite the article – users still need to proofread the suggested formatting.

Each record contains a persistent link which takes the user back to the full citation.

Create a list of relevant records.

Use Add to folder, go to Folder view, and then email the folder contents to yourself.

First select those records you will email.