How to Explore your Field

A handout developed by Maria Kronfeldner, as part of the 2015 CEU Philosophy R&P Lab sessions. (Source: https://ceurplab.wordpress.com/).

Nowadays, it is easy to find a lot of literature for any given philosophical topic. Just google ..., right? But how to find good and relevant references? Experienced researchers *know how* to do it and might even say that they simply ‚have a feel' for it, see it, but are at the same time lost if asked to explain how they do it. The goal of this handout is to give you some guidance for finding material for a research topic of your own.

1. Getting started

If your research question is not yet very specific (e.g. if it is hard to write down a list of keywords), you should first get a secure hold via consulting introductory material.

Have you checked the introductory material in the field?

- Encyclopedia (e.g. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
- Lexica (e.g. Oxford Companion to Philosophy)
- Guides to the literature (e.g. London Philosophy Study Guide)
- Introductions and companions on the field
- Bibliographies

→ You can derive your **keywords** from that material!
→ Get **a feeling for the debate** (who is who, where are the demarcation lines)!
→ You can also **check the library** shelf. The classification in libraries (which books are close to each other) is still a good entrance to a field! Take advantage of the work that goes in maintaining order in a good library!

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2. The anchor strategy

To size down the literature that one finds and to make sure that one finds all the relevant pieces, one needs a search strategy. To search via *Google* (or even *Google Scholar, generally recommended)* and the resulting lucky hits cannot replace a systematic search in professional databases. Furthermore, to search and find is a cumulative process with loops of refinement of your search strategy and keywords. The anchor strategy is a way to do it.

3. Online-Search Tools

Introductions

The CEU library offers face-to-face databank training by a librarian, if you need more help. See: http://library.ceu.edu/help/database-training (if you need help in organizing references, then add this to the topics you are interested when signing up).

Philosophy specific portals and databases, available via the CEU library

The CEU offers a philosophy specific entry: A subject breakdown of the list of databases, broadly defined. See: http://ceu.libguides.com/az.php?s=60475

PhilPapers: http://philpapers.org/
Philpapers cooperates not only with *Google Scholar* but also with *Philosophy Research Index*. Easy and quick access (as *Google Scholar)* and basically a mix of database and document archive. In contrast to Google Scholar, it is specific to philosophy. Authors themselves (as with Google Scholar) can create their own profile (and add items if something is missing). A special feature of *PhilPapers* is the categorization system, which is especially helpful if you have not yet decided about the focus of your research, i.e. if you do not yet have a proper anchor for your research. Full access only with institutional login! It needs to be mentioned that there is another philosophy specific database, the so-called "*Philosopher's Index*". CEU has no access to it however.

General databases, tools and portals

Global Search: http://library.ceu.edu
As the name says, this (now the default search if you go to the CEU library) is intended to be a global search tool. Given that it is pretty comprehensive you should go to this one first if you do a search. It will show you if the items you find are also in *Web of Science*, which allows to create a citation map. Another very useful tool is to search for "similar results" or to check who cited the anchor you have set for the search.

Google Scholar: http://scholar.google.de/
For a quick search, often with direct access to the full content (but most of the time you need your vpn-connection being set up!) A disadvantage: Results are not systematic, less advanced search management and hits cannot be exported as a list. Yet, you should also try the personal profiles that Google Scholar allows authors to create.

Web of Science: http://apps.webofknowledge.com
This is a general tool that covers a whole spectrum of disciplines and covers over 9000 academic journals. Still, some philosophical journals are missing. Since it is such a big database, a good search strategy is very important to get relevant findings and the anchor strategy can help. The options for refinement are particularly good. The most significant feature (that you won't get somewhere else) is the citation- and cluster analysis that it offers. Use it to exploit your anchor. Institutional login is necessary!

JSTOR: http://www.jstor.org/
JSTOR (für Journal Storage) is a very well searchable archive for a huge amount of academic journals from all kinds of disciplines. Many, even if not all philosophical journals are included. Recently it also included some books. If there is no subscription from the university for the respective journals you may not have access to the most recent volumes (sometimes the access might not be directly via the JSTOR site). Therefore, it is not a tool to get the complete recent picture! Yet, you can search the archives of the included journals, which is particularly useful since some authors react to each other in the same journal. Only with institutional login will you get full access

4. A couple of tips and tricks

Tips and tricks:
- How to recognize relevant literature? Here are three fast and frugal heuristics: (a) reliable recommendation (e.g. Syllabus, well-known encyclopedia); (b) recognized publication place (e.g. excellent journal, often marked by a very high rejection rate); (c) high citation rate. But be aware of false negatives (and also false positives)!
- Use the statistical tools such as "find similar articles", "cited by," and the like!
- Adapt your keywords after a while! Find synonyms and antonyms!

Exclude technical problems!

Checklist Explorative Search

1. Why and where do I search?

- Specify the topic (e.g. write down a couple of sentences and one precise question)
- Where should I search first? Justify your choice.
- Which time period is relevant?
- Special notes:

2. Search strategy

- What is my anchor?
- Write down at least 5 keywords? (Often the anchor text contains a couple of them already).
- Alternative keywords? (synonyms, antonyms, translations, more generic or more specific keyword better?)

3. Document your search

Think about a strategy to document your search trajectory so that you can retrieve it later when you continue or need to check back.