

Tips for Conducting an Organized Literature Review

1. Start with an **effective search strategy**.
 - a. Put quotation marks around phrases, i.e. “autism spectrum disorder”
 - b. Join words with operators (AND, OR, NOT), i.e. “autism spectrum disorder” and “elementary school”
 - c. Consider using truncation/wildcard symbols to maximize results, i.e. autism*=autism, autistic
2. **Keep track** of what terms you’ve searched for and where you searched. You might also note the number of results returned for each search to help you remember how effective it was. For example:

Database	Search Phrase	# Results
EducationAbs	(“autism spectrum disorder” or asd) and program*	127
	(“autism spectrum disorder” or asd) and elementary and program*	18
ERIC	(“autism spectrum disorder” or asd) and program*	52
	(“autism spectrum disorder” or asd) and elementary and program*	2

3. **Mine your results** for additional search terms to try. Check the article titles, abstracts, and subject headings!
4. **Use subject headings/descriptors** provided on relevant articles to track down related topics. Subject headings are labels that have been added by an actual person, so you know that if autism is one of the subject headings, the article actually *focuses* on that topic and doesn’t merely mention it. You can either jot down the phrase or click on a subject heading of interest (they are usually hyperlinks) to perform a search for other articles on that subject.
5. **Use RefWorks** to organize the articles you find as you find them. Later, you can search for and delete and duplicates, which is especially helpful when searching over multiple databases and/or multiple days.
6. **Don’t print everything!** You’ll just end up with an overwhelming pile of articles. RefWorks can help with this too: you can create folders to organize the lit review process: PRINT, MAYBE, FURTHER RESEARCH, etc.