# Stepping Up Your Scholarly Research II: Tips for Databases & Search Strategies

*Graduate Online Success Series*
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*Fall 2026*

Drexel University Libraries

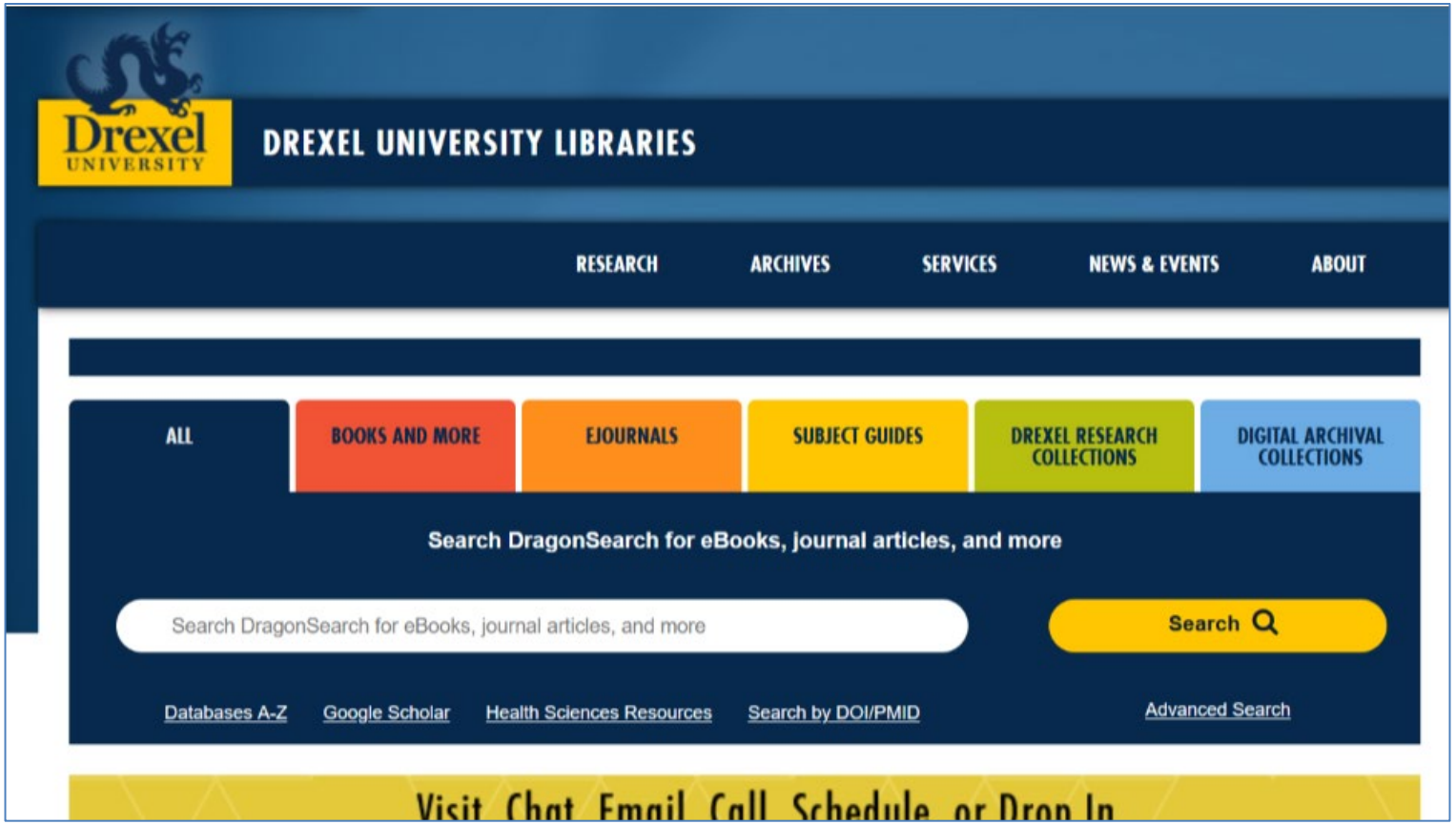
# Agenda

1. Library Homepage Basics
2. Research Questions
3. Translating into a Search Strategy
4. Selecting Databases
5. Searching in Databases
6. Citation Searching
7. Saving results and Citation Management Tools

# 1. Drexel University Libraries Basics

- Dragon Search
- Databases A to Z
- Subject and Course Guides
- Interlibrary Loan
- 24/7 Chat
- Research Assistance / Consults with subject librarians

# Library Homepage and Dragon Search Demo



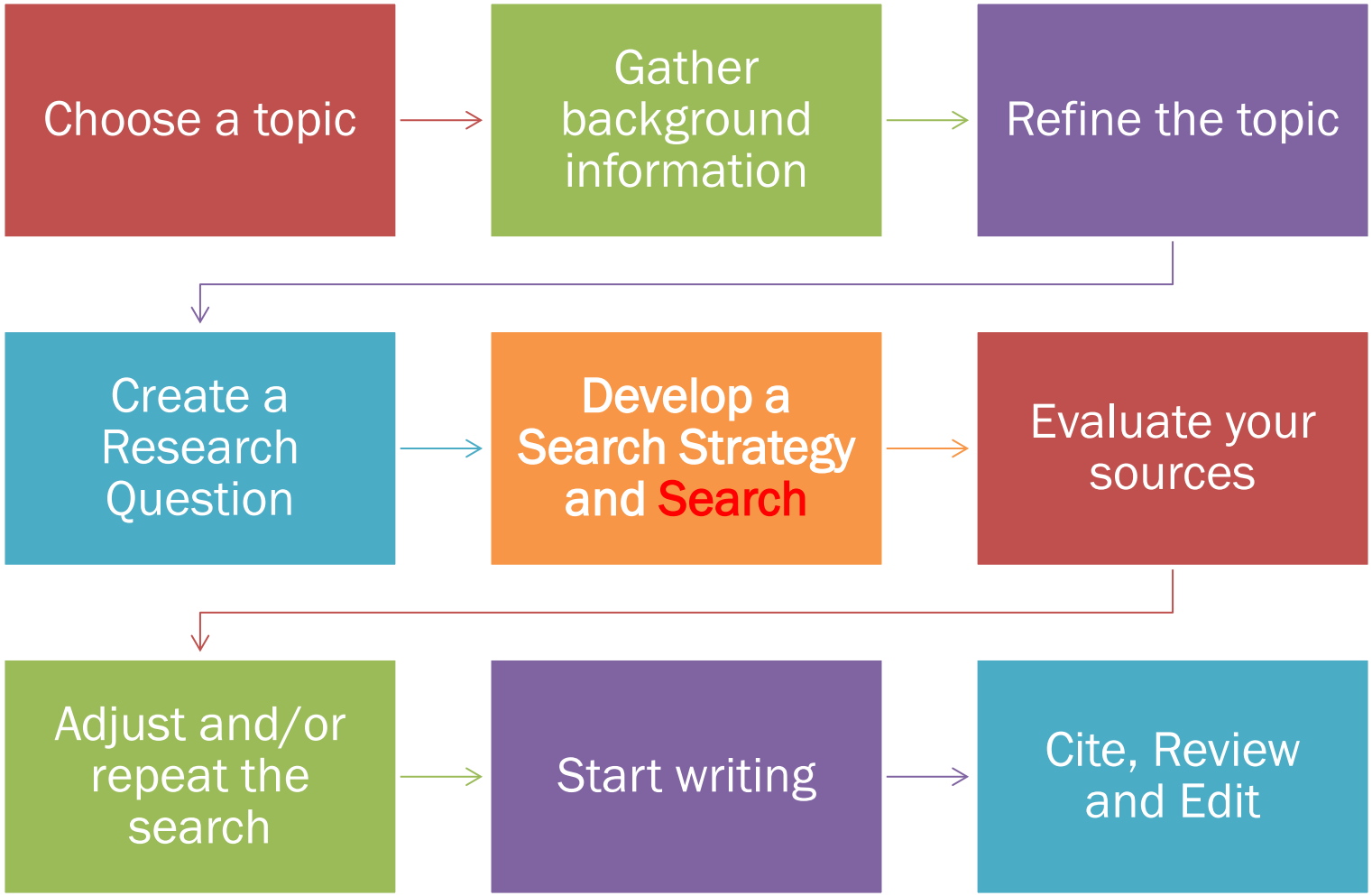
# 2. Research Questions

- A *research strategy* will help
  - focus the topic
  - organize the search
  - manage time efficiently
  - progress from general to specific resources
  - understand if the topic has been examined thoroughly enough
  - ID knowledge gaps on the topic

# Research Questions

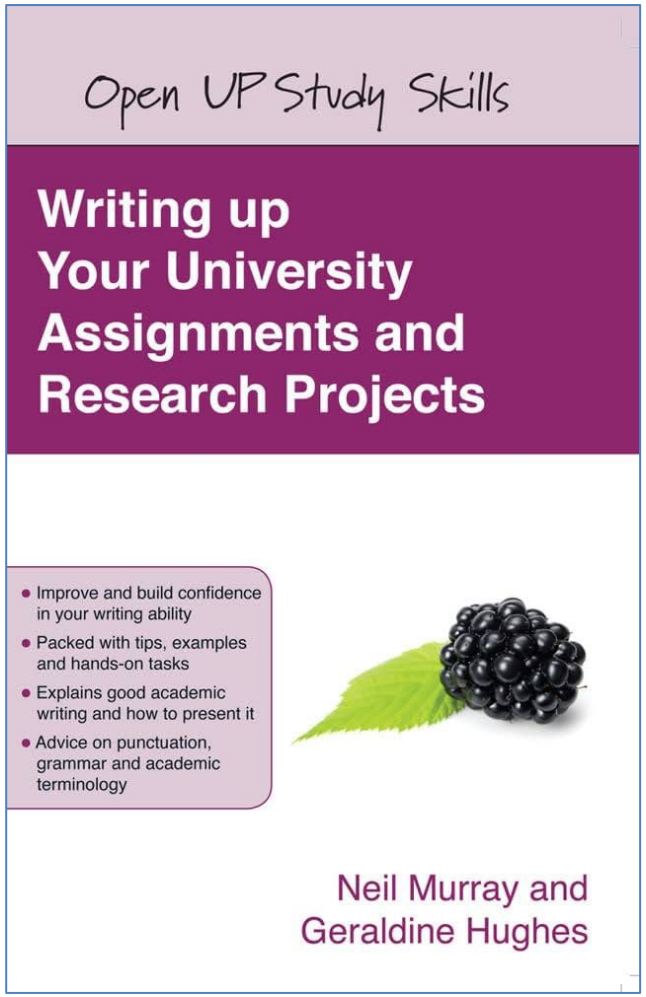
- The process takes *time* and *effort*.
  - You should not expect to complete all steps in a single sitting.
- By thoughtfully approaching your topic you will be able to research the topic in an organized fashion and compose a thorough scholarly paper.

# Research process



# Suggested reading

- *Writing up Your University Assignments and Research Projects* by Neil Murray & Geraldine Hughes.
- “Academic writing can be a daunting prospect for new undergraduates and postgraduates alike. This accessible book provides students with all they need to know to produce excellent written work.”



# Choosing a topic and gathering background information

- **Aim for a happy medium**
  - Topic not too broad but also not too narrow in scope.
  - Who, what, where, when, and why.
- **Gather background information**
  - Consult news articles, books, encyclopedia and internet searching to gather information to start.
  - **Dragon Search** can be helpful.
- **Using Google**
  - Locate credible professional associations, organizations and government pages.
- **Iterative process**
  - Research questions evolve.
  - Search will not be one and done.
- **Transition into the search**
  - Breaking down the big search concepts into manageable pieces.

# Where to gather background information?

- **Dragon Search (Library Homepage)**
  - Very broad, searches across library catalog.
- **Databases A to Z**
  - Listing of all library databases.
- **Subject and course guides with database links**
  - Will contain links to suggested databases based on subject and discipline.

# 3. Constructing a Search Strategy

- Define your search question/topic.
- Identify the separate concepts in your question.
- For each concept, think of appropriate search terms, including synonyms and related terms.
- Map out how to connect your search terms.

## Define your question:

What is the effect of video games on empathy in teenagers?

# Identify the separate concepts in your question:

What is the effect of video games on empathy in teenagers?

# Think of appropriate search terms, including synonyms and related terms:

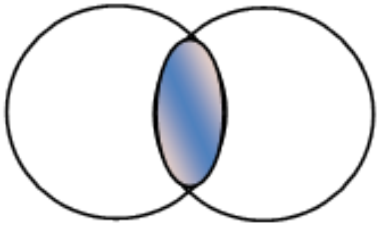
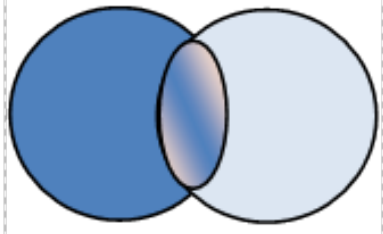
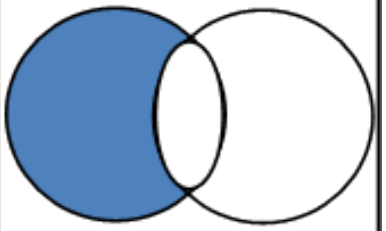
| Video Games | Empathy | Teenagers |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

# Think of appropriate search terms, including synonyms and related terms:

| Video Games | Empathy | Teenagers |
|---|---|---|
| Gaming | sympathy | Teens |
| Virtual reality | compassion | Adolescents (or adolescence) |
| Computer games | | Youths |
| | | [database age filters] |

If the database(s) you're using has a thesaurus or listing of subject terms (controlled vocabulary), look there for equivalent or related terms.

# Connect terms together with Boolean Operators

| cats **AND** dogs | cats **OR** dogs | cats **NOT** dogs |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| retrieves items that contain both terms | retrieves items that contain either term | retrieves items that contain only one term |

# Combining Search Terms: Boolean Operators

- OR
  - broadens a search by telling the database that *any* of the words it connects are acceptable.

- AND
  - narrows a search by telling the database that **ALL keywords used must be found** in an article in order for it to appear in your results list.

## Combine synonyms or related terms with OR:

Teenagers

**OR**

Adolescents

**OR**

Youth

**OR**

Youths

# Combine separate concepts with AND:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Video Games | | Empathy | | Teenagers |
| **OR** | | **OR** | | **OR** |
| Gaming | | Sympathy | | Adolescent |
| **OR** | **AND** | **OR** | **AND** | **OR** |
| Computer Games | | Compassion | | Youth |
| **OR** | | | | **OR** |
| Virtual Reality | | | | Youths |

# 4. Selecting databases

- Research can be interdisciplinary, so consider all the subject areas that your topic can fall into.
- Use **Databases A to Z** to see databases by subject or use our Subject Guides.

# 5. Searching in databases

- Each database has unique interfaces and settings.
- Consider creating a login for each platform you may use frequently to save searches and content:
  - EBSCOhost, Clarivate, ProQuest, Gale, McGraw Hill, Wolter Kluwer, Elsevier, Taylor & Francis.
    - Car make and model:
    - EBSCOhost → CINAHL, APA PsycINFO, Criminal Justice Abstracts
    - Toyota → Prius, Camry, Highlander

# Quick database search tips

- Each database has unique interfaces and settings.
- Consider creating a login for each platform you may use frequently to save searches and content

# “Phrase searching”

- Add quotes to get phrases
  - “Critical Care Nursing”
  - “SARS CoV2”

# Truncation

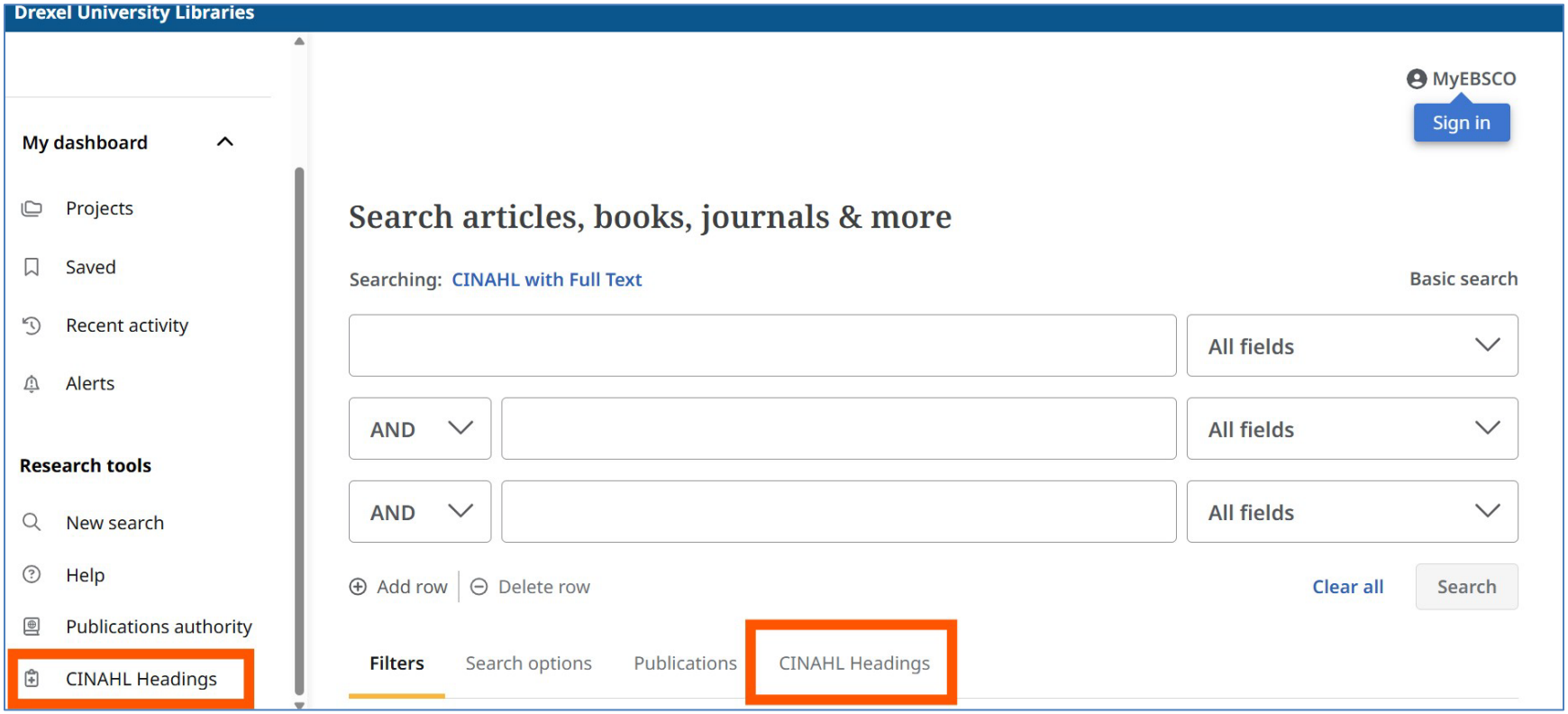
- Add a * at the end of a root word to get variations on spelling
  - **Nurs*** = the database will search for nurse, nursing, nurses.
  - **interact*** = the database will search for interact, interacting, interaction, and interactivity.

# Limiters and Filters

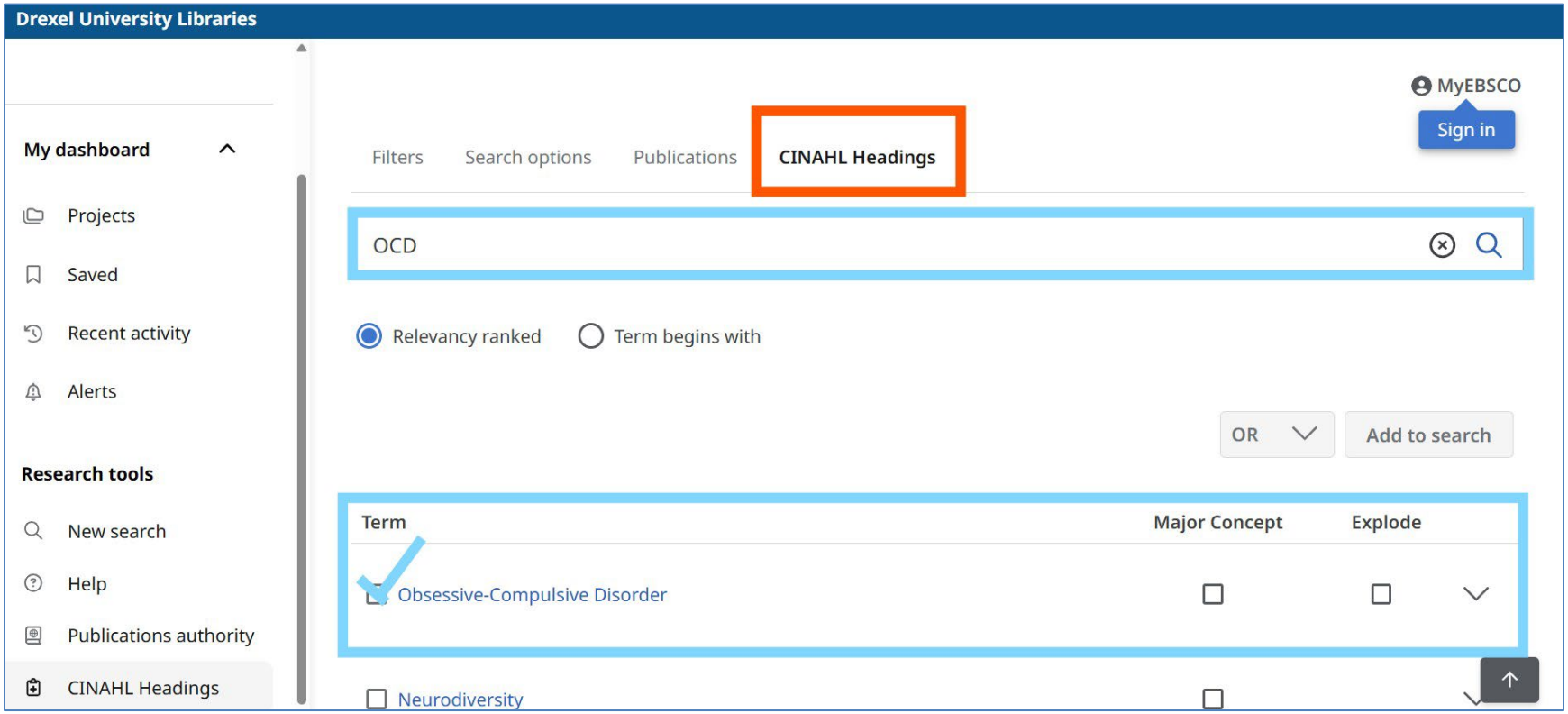
- Add in limiters and filters as needed:
  - Publication year
  - English language
  - Peer reviewed
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Geography
  - Source type

# Controlled Vocabulary the “hashtags” for databases

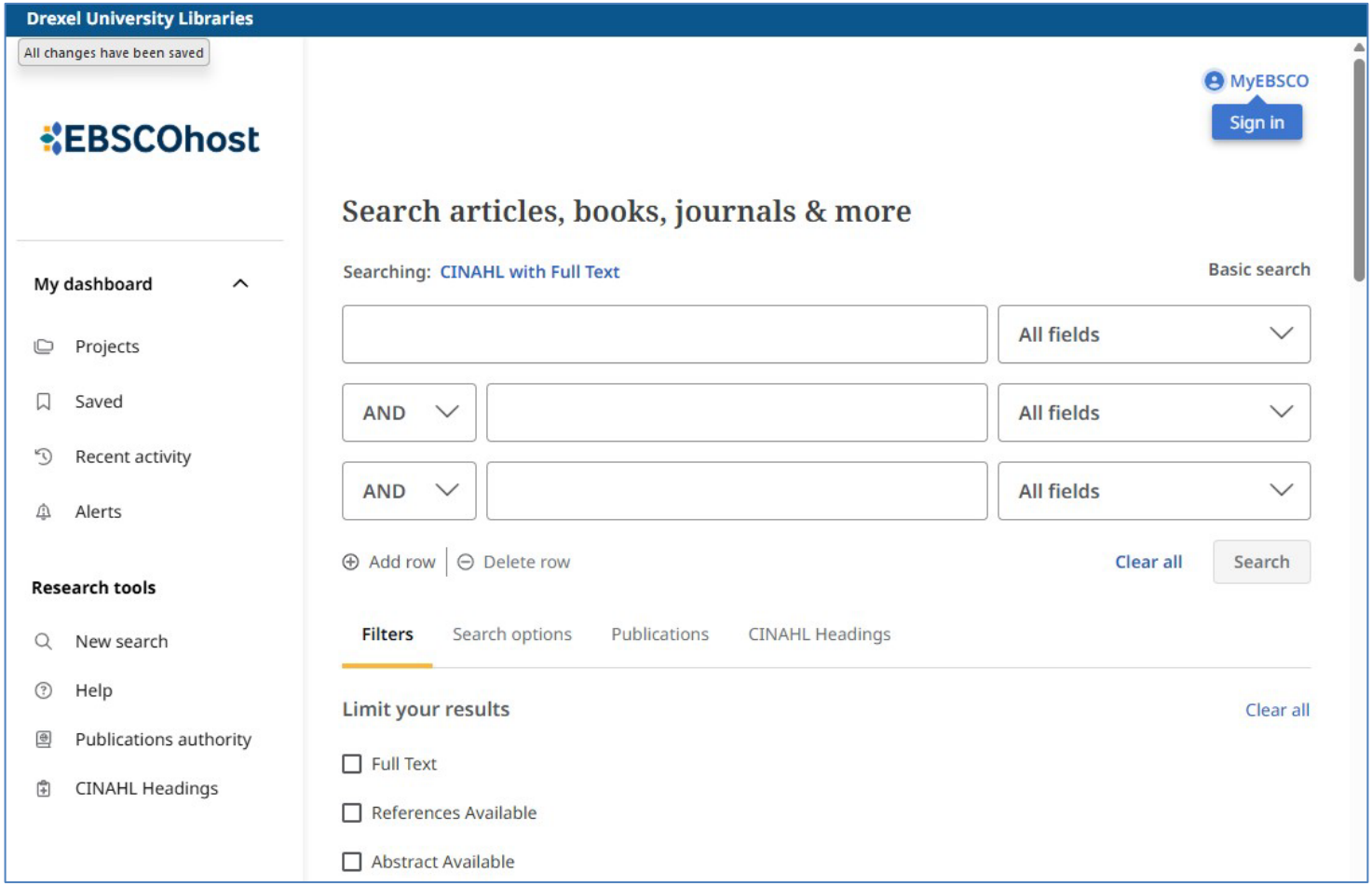
## CINAHL Headings



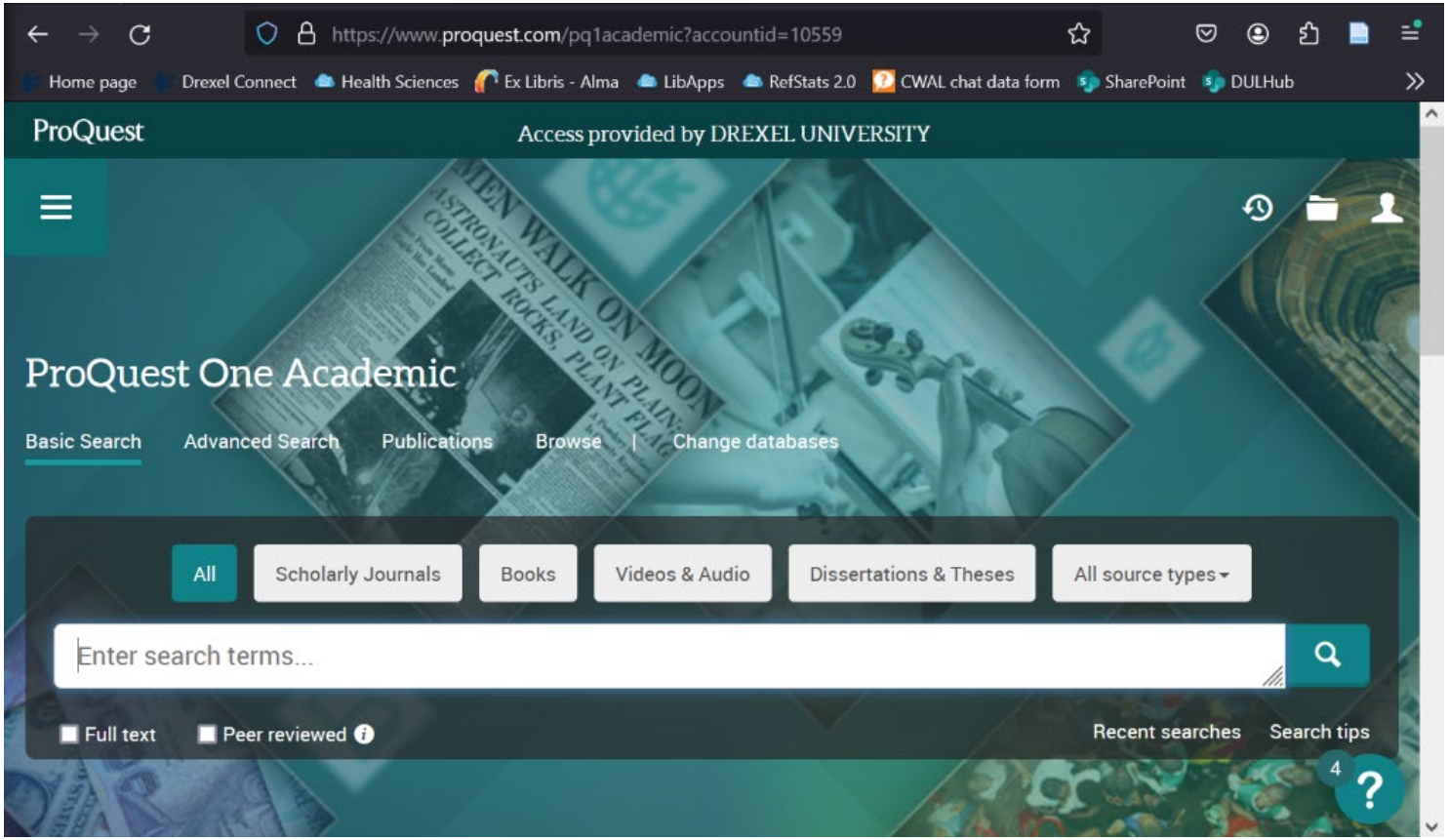
# Controlled Vocabulary – CINAHL Headings



# CINAHL with Full Text (EBSCOhost) Demo



# (ProQuest) One Academic



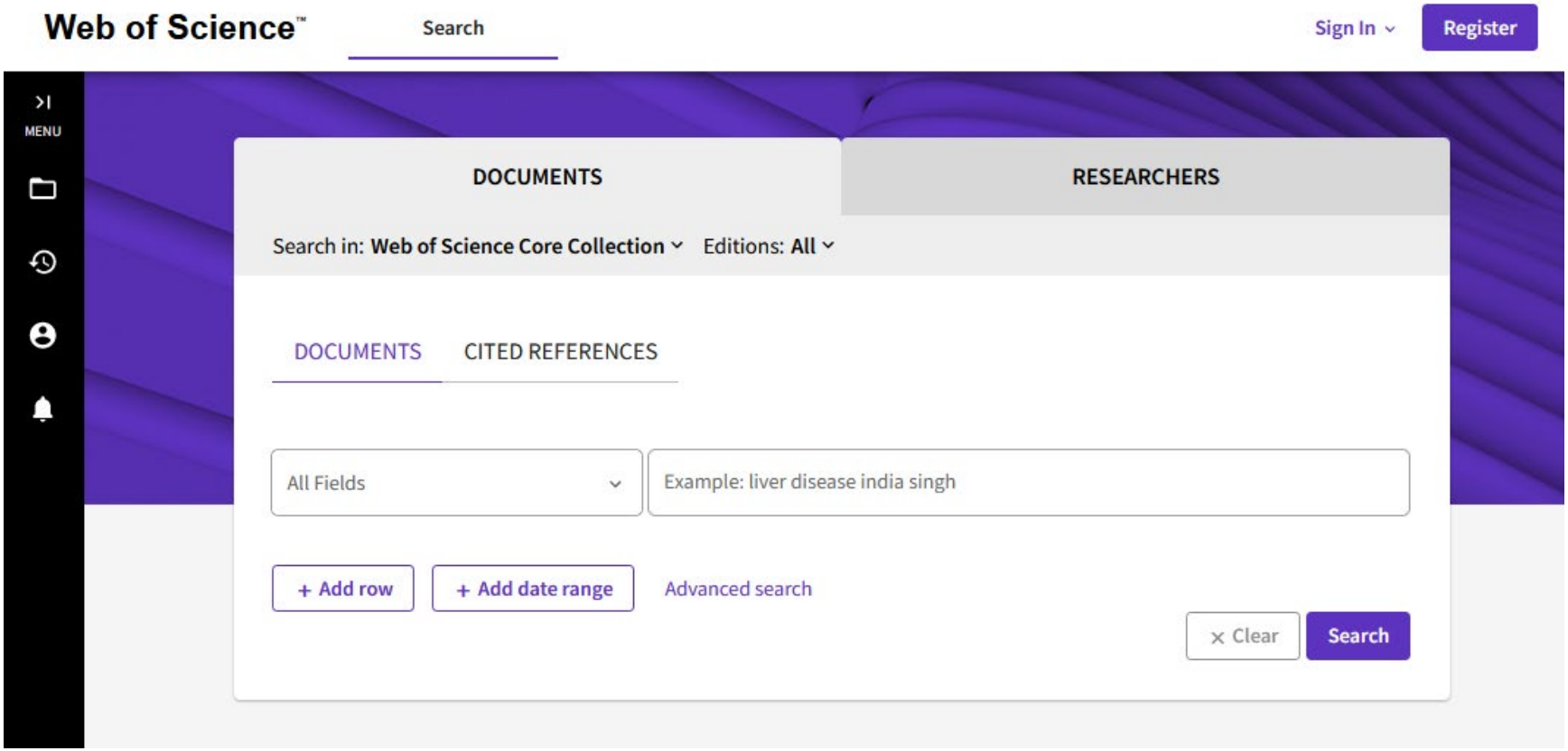
# 6. Citation Searching

- Citation searching is useful when you want to analyze literature in a way that keyword or subject searching does not allow, such as when you are exploring a new area of study and are either studying the current state of research in that area or are still learning the *language* of the topic.
- Citation searching is good for:
  - Gathering relevant literature quickly.
  - Identifying good and appropriate keywords for future searches.
  - Using the knowledge and research of the original author, through citation, to save time.
  - Mapping out a *scholarly conversation* in a particular area.

# Citation Searching Definitions

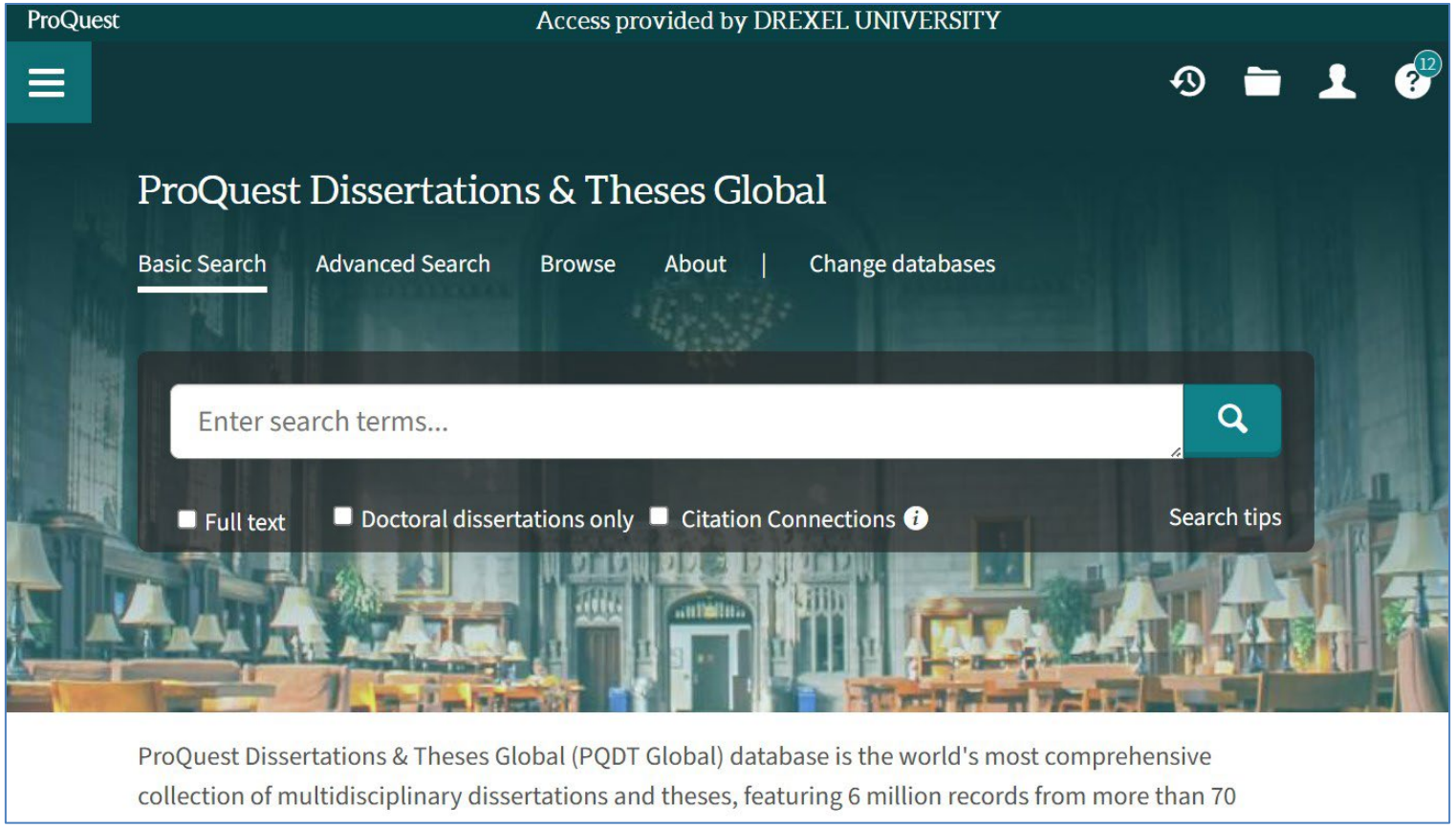
- **Citation mining:** The act of using citations to locate additional articles related to a research topic. Citation mining helps you find literature from other literature.
- **Forward Citation Search**: A search to find all of the articles that cite back to a specific article. This search looks forward in time to see how this article contributed to the scholarly conversation.
- **Backward Citation Search**: A search to find all of the cited references in a single article. This search looks backwards in time to see what led to the article you start with.
- **Author Citation Search**: A search to find all articles by an author or group of authors.

# Web of Science Citation Searching Demo



# ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global

## Citation Searching Demo



# Workshop Practice

- https://padlet.com/sh3675/stepping-up-your-scholarly-research-developing-and-refining--s024i8wv29x46c9garqz

# 7. Citation Management Tools

- EndNote
- Zotero