# Activity: Exploring databases with Google docs

## Purpose:

Students work in groups to explore a particular database, and report back to the instructor/class using a Google doc form.

## Learning outcome:

**Research as Inquiry**

**Searching as Strategic Exploration**

* Students will construct a search using their keywords in a designated database in order to find three articles are superficially relevant to their research topic.
* Students will analyze one database in order to articulate one useful feature of the database for their research assignment, and explain why or how the feature might be useful to their assignment.

Suggestions for use: *Use this activity to get students working in databases in a structured way. It’s also a great way for you to see and correct any misinterpretations they may have about the databases, since they are talking and working in groups. Also great for quiet classes- they are still sharing out in the Google doc, but don’t have to talk in front of the class. Typically I sandwich this activity between students working with a research question to find keywords and an end of class discussion of the scholarly conversation/why we cite. If you have a good, meaty research question that you diagrammed on the board earlier in class (which I highly, highly suggest), you can repurpose it for students/classes that are not prepared to use their own research questions. Having the whole class search for the same question in different databases can also be instructive, as they will see that using different resources yields different results.*

*I frequently use this activity for first year writing classes when the faculty member has asked me to demo databases but have also used it with great success in higher-level discipline specific classes and my colleagues have used it with graduate students.*

## Materials:

* Pre-made Google doc saved to your Google Drive. The link for the template is embedded below, along with instructions on how to edit it for your class.
* Sample question (make sure it is sufficiently “meaty” and hopefully related to the class)- optional

## Time: 25-40 minutes

## How-To:

Briefly (being the operative word) introduce each of the databases that students may find most useful for their assignment (3-5, including whatever you use for your library catalog). Put the premade Google doc up on the screen. Have students break into groups of 3-4. Assign each group to a database, and have them select their roles. One student is the searcher, putting keywords into the database, filtering the results, etc. One student is the documenter, writing the keywords, search process, and finally the citation in the Google doc. The other students provide suggestions to the searcher and help the documenter keep up. Students may either use the question of someone in their group (beware, it might take them a while to decide!) or a question that you come up with (preferably, one that you have already modeled on the board.) If you have a large class, multiple groups can search the same database and type their search process into different rows in the doc.

Students then search in the database for however long you give them (I try to give this activity half an hour), while you help groups troubleshoot and suggest features they may not notice. Give a three minute warning near the end to make sure that everyone has put in a citation.

Share out to class- using the Google doc, point out particularly effective search strategies, good keywords, follow a couple of the citations, point out anything about the databases that they missed, etc., and ask groups what they liked/didn’t like about their assigned database.

I’ve found that this activity works best if you emphasize to students that the most important part of the activity is find a useful feature of the database and that finding their citation is just the structure for getting there. I often tell students they are in charge of finding a reason for why their classmates should use this database for their research, and that seems to motivate them to take a good look at some of the features of the database.

## Screenshots from Google Doc Template:

Template can be accessed at <http://bit.ly/database_google_template>







