How Databases Work Lesson Plan
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Learning Outcomes
Upon successful completion of this lesson students will:
- Articulate a definition of “library database;”
- Identify fields searched in library databases, and
- Identify techniques for searching databases.

Time requirement: 50 minutes

Materials
- Index cards
- Dry erase board and markers
- Enough different articles from electronic databases all on the same theme for class to work in teams of 2,
- 1 “library database” handout for each student, and
- 1 “homework” sheet for each student

Demonstration / Modeling (10 minutes)
The librarian will have printed out a thematic group of articles ahead of time. (In the past, I found articles by searching the keywords “Holidays and stress.” I chose a variety of articles: some from journals, some from newspapers, some from news magazines, etc. Some of the articles had “holidays and stress” as the subject heading, some mentioned this in passing. The success of the lesson depends on choosing articles that are thematically related, but different from each other as well. All the articles should contain some of the same keywords, but this works best if some of the articles are on different subjects, so students see that just because articles are in the same results list, doesn’t mean they’re all on the same subject.

The librarian will tell the class that today we are going to learn about library databases by BEING a database. Pass out index cards, and ask students to write a definition of what they think a library database is.

Guided Practice (20 minutes)
The librarian will pass out the articles, and have the class work in teams of 2. Each team will get one article, and each person will get one “Database Worksheet.” The teams fill out the worksheet. (There are often a lot of questions about the difference between “subject” and “keyword” which the librarian should be prepared to answer.) The librarian will help students fill out the worksheet as needed.
Demonstration / Assessment (20 minutes)

After groups have completed the worksheet, the librarian will draw a database search box on the dry-erase board. It will say “search __________ in ________”. The librarian will have prepared searches ahead of time, and will write in searches. In the holiday / stress example, I would have written in “search stress in keyword.” Students for whom the search matches their worksheet results raise their hand, and tell everyone the title of the article. Do a variety of searches; author searches, title searches, keyword searches, subject searches and advanced searches, where you are combining fields or terms.

After you have done a number of examples, demonstrate for the class how this is the same exact technique used to search the library’s databases. Demonstrate the advanced search on EBSCO Academic Search Complete, which allows you to search specific fields. Talk about what you can do if you don’t know what subject headings to use.

Ask students to turn their index card over, and answer the following questions: Has their understanding of a library database changed since the beginning of the class? If so, how? Collect the index cards from the students.

**Homework**

Optional (check with instructor). Handout the “homework” sheet, and have students find an article in a library database for their next class meeting.