On the Ithaca College Library web site, PsycINFO is available through Ebsco. The top of the first screen will look like this:

The Ebsco platform allows you to perform complicated searches rather easily. You can use various combinations of words and select one of many fields to search for different names, words, or phrases. Additional options let you limit searches several other ways, including by date, publication type, or specific journal.

**Search Strategies**

To begin you must construct a search strategy. All that really means is that you need to add words or phrases to one or more of the search boxes. You can just enter a word or two in the first box, but if you do so you will likely get a huge number of unrelated results. Very broad searches are not very useful, but to get an idea of what is out there it might be a good way to begin.

For example, a search using the keyword “lesbian” generates over 9500 records.

If all the 9500+ records were all useful and related, you could just pick the first few and be done with it. Unfortunately, they won’t all be useful and related. The first four results when searching “lesbian” generates records for a manual about *step-family therapy*, a *textbook* about lesbian and gay couples, a journal article about *adolescent smoking*, another article about lesbian, gay, and bisexual *substance use patterns*. 
For more better, more productive searches, try using two or more of the boxes to narrow or refine your search. To figure out what to put in the boxes, you first need to figure out what you are looking for. A fancier way of saying this is to create a thesis statement. Doing broad searches can help with this, since as you browse through a few pages of records, topics might suggest themselves. Coupling this activity with brainstorming is an excellent way to come up with ideas. Looking at a couple dozen of 9500+ records, you might decide you want to focus on the psychological aspects of hostility shown toward lesbian high school students.

The next step is converting the thesis statement to a group of keywords. Lesbian, of course, is one. High school, another. The term psychological aspects is unnecessary in an psychology database. Hostility could easily be expanded to include other keywords such as bullying, harassment, violence, and victimization. When you put them together, you are building a search statement.

Whether or not you realize it, when you fill in the boxes you are using Boolean or Set Logic. The two main Boolean search operators are AND and OR. AND narrows, and OR broadens your search.

Note the preceding the second and third rows. If you were researching psychological aspects of hostility shown toward lesbian high school students, in the first row you might start by entering lesbian in the first box in the second row you might add high school. Your search statement is lesbian AND high school, and there are 165 results. Quite a reduction from more than 9500.

You are finished narrowing your search, however, unless you want to spend the next few hours examining all 165 results. In the third line you can add the keywords related to hostility, hostility, bullying, harassment, violence, and victimization, each one separated by an OR: hostility OR bullying OR harassment OR violence OR victimization.

The OR operator expands your search, since the search will be culling for any record that has any of those words. Combining searches with ANDs and ORs can make for some very sophisticated searching. Your search now will yield all records that mention lesbians, or gays only if they also include the phrase high school and any one of the following terms: hostility, bullying, harassment, violence, and victimization.
In Boolean or set logic terms, your search strategy would be: *(lesbian*) AND (high school) AND (hostility OR bullying OR harassment OR violence OR victimization). Your search strategy in PsycINFO would look like this:

If you quit here, you would be in pretty good shape, but there are additional means of refining your search to produce even better results.

**Truncation**

If you wish to search for lesbian, lesbians, and lesbianism, you could type out lesbian OR lesbians OR lesbianism. But an easier way would be to type lesbian*. The asterisk truncates a search term at its root to expand the search to find all words that include that root. Truncation is probably unnecessary for high school, bullying and harassment, but truncation of hostil*, violen*, and victim* could relevantly broaden your search. Some times the difference can be a lot, but not always. A new search using truncated terms this time only produces three more records.

**Field Searching**

Notice that beside the search boxes are pull-down menus where the default is Select a Field. Searching without selecting a field can be a good strategy when you are starting out, but as you start to refine your search, selecting a field can be quite important. If you know the name of author, it makes sense to search for that person in the Author field. If someone has given you the title of an article to look up, an easier way to find it is to type the first few words or some key or unusual words from the title and then select Title.
Subject searches are powerful ways to search. On the pull-down menu listing fields are both **SU Subjects** and **DE Subjects (exact)**. The **DE** stands for **Descriptors**, and descriptors are specific subject terms created by the American Psychological Association indexers to control how subjects can be searched. The object is to make searches precise. Descriptors are vocabulary terms that were originally (before the online era) listed in the *Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms*. Each record in PsycINFO has been examined by an APA expert, who then assigns five or six descriptors to it. In contrast **SU Subjects** are subject headings that assigned by an indexer working for EbscoHost, the platform that hosts PsycINFO. In practice, there is only a small different between **SU Subjects** and **DE Subjects (exact)**. Authors often contribute keywords for their own articles, and their terms can be searched by using the field **KW Keywords**.

While in PsycINFO, you can consult the Thesaurus yourself. There is a link to it on the top bar. Browsing the PsycINFO Thesaurus, you can confirm that a term is a descriptor. In the example below, you can see that Harassment is a descriptor. You can also see find related, narrower, or broader terms when you browse the Thesaurus. In the example below you can see that Sexual Harassment is a narrower Descriptor.
Journal Articles or Peer-Reviewed Articles

Often instructors require their students to use articles from peer-reviewed journals. In PsycINFO, popular magazines are not indexed, but books, conferences, doctoral dissertations, and some other kinds of resources are. It is easy to limit your search results to peer-reviewed journals by selecting the box for “Peer Reviewed Journals” found in the left-side column.
Modifying searches

Only rarely will the first version of your search strategy produce the exact results you are looking for, or should be looking for. Once you view the list of records and a few individual records, however, you can start to adapt your search strategy. Before you add more key words and phrases to the search boxes, you might look at the records listed on the Results page and get ideas on how to narrow or expand your search by the reviewing titles, abstracts, and subjects listed. If several articles that you found using the term Harassment include the term Bullying, you might decide that is a better concept to use. If several that look interesting also include the term Human Sex Differences, you might then revise your search by adding that term. Your goal should be to narrow the number of results to a manageable size (number will vary depending on the nature of the assignment). Equally important is that they should all be related to each other.

There are also ways to limit your search beyond using different search terms. In addition to limiting your search to peer-reviewed articles, you can limit by date, age group, population group (human, animal, male, and others), or methodology (you can limit to EMPIRICAL STUDIES only). You will find these limits at the bottom of the first search screen. But you have to scroll down to see many of the limits, you, as thousands like you, may not know they exist.

Full Text

PsycINFO is an abstracting service, but many of the records are linked to the full text of the articles in html format or pdf images. To discover whether or not the full text is available, look at the last line of the record as it appears on the Results page. If you are lucky, there will be a link to Full-Text HTML, Full-Text PDF, or both:

More often you will see a green arrow:

The phrase “Find Full-Text” should probably be a question, since you may or may not gain immediate access to full text. After you click on the arrow, a new window will pop up. One of several possibilities will happen.

1) If you are very lucky, the screen will advise you that the full text is available, and you can click on a link to go directly to the article:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holdings</th>
<th>Links to full-text</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01/01/1996 - present</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/01/1996 - present</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2) If you not quite as lucky, you will get a message that the full text is available, but you will have to take several more steps before the article is available, and you may have to come into the library to find a hard copy of the journal:

**Full-Text is available:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holdings</th>
<th>Links to full-text</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Ithaca College Print Holdings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Even if you are not very lucky at all, and the window advises you that no full text was found, you will be given the option of trying Interlibrary Loan.

**No Full-Text found for this article.**

*Would you like to try Interlibrary Loan?*

Interlibrary Loan Request

For articles, ILL is a document delivery service, and after you have submitted a request, usually within a few days. This is no guarantee, but often you will get an email with the article attached the following day. Alas, rarely, but some of the time, an article might take several weeks).

**Managing records**

PsycINFO on the EbscoHost platform allows you to save, print, and e-mail records. You can do that one at a time, or you can put the records into a folder and save, print, or e-mail the list of records. Once you have selected the records, to work with them, you must then go to Folder View. Once in the folder, you can then print, e-mail, save, or export the records.
APA Format
One of the benefits of printing, e-mailing, saving, or exporting is that you can have the bibliographic information converted into proper APA format. Select Citation Format and select APA.

A Few More Tips

What if you have too many search results?
Add more search terms using the AND operator, search within a field, or use some of the other limits available.

What if you have too few search results?
Add more search terms using the AND operator, and be sure to truncate.

What if you get no results at all?
Check your spelling, make sure you have not typed in long phrases or full sentences. Consult the Thesaurus for authorized Descriptors.

What if I still have questions?
Please call, email, or consult with John Henderson, Social Sciences Librarian, Ithaca College Library. Contact and other information is available on the Research by Subject: Psychology website: http://www.ithacalibrary.com/sp/subjects/psych