Hi, everyone! My name is Miss Bass, and I’m your school’s library clerk. Today I’m going to show you how to research topics for your science classes using a few of the databases from Spokane Public Library. All Spokane Schools students and staff have automatic library cards with the public library thanks to a partnership we have with them.

Before we get start looking for articles, I want to have a place to put notes or any information I find and want to save. I like using a basic Word doc. If you find an article that’s helpful and you think you might end up using it for your project, put its citation in your document. By doing this, information from different sites and sources is all together.

Whenever you’re working with Word or any other Microsoft software, always make you’re your document is automatically saving. You can do that by clicking this toggle up here where it says AutoSave.

When naming your document, choose something specific. Put your teacher’s name and the assignment so you can easily find your research later. You’ll save yourself time and energy by being organized from the beginning. Since you’re taking the time to get and save citations now, putting together your bibliography later is going to be a lot easier. Future you will thank present you.

Now that we’re all set up, let’s get started.

So why databases? Why bother using sites like these when you can just Google something? When you use Google, you can get worthwhile results, but you’ll also get a lot of junk. When you search using a database, you know you’re always going to get factual, scholarly information.

I’m going to start by opening Clever. Next, I’ll click library on the left-side menu, and then I’ll select Spokane Public Library. Here’s where I’ll see my card number and PIN. You’ll want to go ahead and copy or write down your account number since you’ll need it to log in to the databases.

Now I’ll click on Digital Branch and will select Research and Databases. Click on Homework Help: Teens. The site I’m going to demonstrate first today is one of my favorites, and that’s Gale in Context: Science. Here’s where you’ll need to enter your account number.

With research projects, you’re often in one of two situations: either your teacher has given you a specific topic for your project or they’ve told you to choose something on your own. If you can choose your own topic, getting started can feel overwhelming. This site makes research easy by having some preselected research topics which you can see down here. You can start here to find some inspiration.

I’m going to click on Physics and Astronomy. Say you’re interested in atoms. Click on atoms and atomic theory. This page is great because the database has done a lot of research for you. Here’s an overview of the topic, articles, images, videos, and more. This type of page is why I like this site so much. Down here at the bottom are more specific topics. Searching just for atoms is vague, but these topics are more specific. After looking at this page, maybe you’ve decided you want your topic to be atomic structure. Now you’re taken to a new page with even more focused information.

Let’s say that your teacher has told you what your research project is going to be about, and that they want you to write about Albert Einstein and his theory of relativity. Let’s go back to the home page and try searching. I’ll start by searching for Einstein. That takes me to this page, and right away I see an article about relativity. This might be a great overview, but perhaps your teacher wants you to use sources that were published within a certain timeframe, such as the last five or ten years. This article was published in 2001, so let’s look for something newer. I can click on view all related articles to get more information about relativity. Here I see several more current articles. I want to see this one. After reading it over, I decide I like it and might use it for my project. I’ll get the citation and paste it into Word.

Now that we’ve looked at that database, I want to show you another one called eLibrary. I’ll go back to that Clever link, copy my account number again if I need to, and I’ll go back to homework help and select eLibrary. This site also has some topic suggestions for you, but since we already know what those are like, I want to show you how to do an advanced search.

First, I’ll try doing a basic search for relativity. That gets me over 9000 results. Now I’ll try an advanced search to see fewer, more helpful articles. Perhaps your teacher said at least one of your sources needs to come from a scholarly journal. I’ll select that. Now I want to limit the time frame articles have been published. I’ll say I want articles that aren’t over 5 years old by doing a custom date. Now I’ll search, and I see that I have 549 results. That’s a lot better than 9000.

I’ll click on this article. This seems interesting, and I want to save it. I’ll click cite, copy, then paste it into Word. One thing I want you to note about eLibrary is that you can have articles read to you by clicking on this listen icon up here. Another thing I want you to see is the list of related subjects you’ll get with any article.

Scroll down to the bottom. Here are all the subjects related to the article we just saved. Click one of them to be taken to articles about that subject. Here we have over 8400 results for astrophysics. If this is a subject I’m interested in, I’ll narrow down the results by using these options over here. This time I want a magazine article and I want it to be from the last year. Now I’ve got 14 articles, and that feels manageable.

If you haven’t found enough sources between Gale and eLibrary, there’s another database I want you to see and that’s ProQuest. I’ll get to it the way I got to the others. ProQuest is best used when you know exactly what you’re researching. If you’re still choosing a topic, I’d suggest sticking to the other databases. I say that because ProQuest has a ton of information and it can get overwhelming quickly if you don’t know what you want. I want to give you an example here of how important it is to be specific when you’re using ProQuest.

I’m going to start by being as generic as I can be and will type in science. Here I have over 21 million results. Now I’ll get a little bit more precise and will search for physics. Now I have fewer articles, but I still have 2 million. When I’m even more specific and search for relativity, I’m down to nearly 200,000 results. I can get that number lower by selecting full text articles only and choosing things that have been published in the last year. That’s still a huge number of sources, so let’s get even more selective. Under where it says Person, I see there are articles that talk about both relativity and Einstein, and that there are only 105 of them. Now that’s a number I can work with.

I went through those steps to demonstrate how to narrow down your search results but I also wanted you to see how important it is for you to be precise when using ProQuest. Now I’ll show you how to do that from the very beginning.

This time I want to do an advanced search. I want articles about relativity **and** Einstein, but you can change these settings to be whatever you want. I want full text only. Some teachers might require peer reviewed articles, so if yours does, select that too. I want articles from the last 3 years. And I want articles from magazines **and** scholarly journals. Now I’ll click search. I have over 2000 results, but that’s a lot better than the numbers I had earlier when my searches were vague. Just like we did on eLibrary, I can narrow my results even more by exploring options over here. I can easily cite articles by clicking here.

To recap, here’s what I want you to remember from this tutorial. If you’re unsure of what your research topic will be, Gale in Context: Science and eLibrary are great places to start. Once you’re sure of your topic and feel more comfortable doing academic research, ProQuest is a wonderful resource for you. No matter where you’re getting your research, keep track of all of it. This document doesn’t have to look nice, but it does need to be named something that will help you find it easily.

If you have questions about what I’ve covered here, you can email me at andreab@spokaneschools.org and I’ll be happy to help you more. Thanks for your time today.