SSCI Web of Science

Finding literature: Using the Social Science Citation Index

Here is a brief guide to using the Social Science Citation Index to produce effective literature searches which identify the best research published on any topic.

Step 1. Link in to the Social Science Citation Index (hereafter SSCI) ..................................... 1
Step 2: Check recent work on any topic................................................................................... 2
Step 3: Selecting articles .......................................................................................................... 3
Step 4: Expanding your search terms ...................................................................................... 4
Step 5: Following the most useful abstracts and references .................................................. 5
Step 6: Follow the citations..................................................................................................... 6
Step 7: Generating an automatic selected bibliography .......................................................... 7
Step 8: Optional: check recent work citing an author............................................................... 8

Step 1. Link in to the Social Science Citation Index (hereafter SSCI)

http://eresearch.lib.harvard.edu/V/1MRP6QDO83C7MHEPFH9CGT7JUBR25SFETH5EJ62DIL3KARRGYH-26745?func=native-link&resource=HVD02803

(You will need to go through the Harvard password system to get remote access)

The following screen opens up:

Optional: Click OFF the Science and the Arts and Humanities Indexes to narrow your search.
Step 2: Check recent work on any topic

Click ‘General search’ on the above screen

Type in some keywords – you need to try different variants until you come up with the most focused search. Use Boolean searches (AND, OR, etc)

Here I used ‘Consociationalism’ and ‘Democracy’

I also narrowed the search to ‘English’ language publications and document types to ‘Articles’

This generated the following range of articles listed with the most recent first.
Step 3: Selecting articles

I immediately spotted one excellent review journal (Annual Review of Political Science) which has a recent article (2000) by Andeweg. This is essential reading and a great shortcut to the literature. If you simply click the View Full Text button beneath this entry this will lead you to the full PDF article for downloading/printing.

I skimmed the others to see if they are relevant – there is an excellent piece by Lijphart that updates his previous work. There is a good critique of Lijphart by Bogaards. Accordingly I ‘checked’ the box against each of these and then hit ‘Add to Marked List’ to save these records.

You might want to skim the abstract of the others to see if they are relevant to your work. There are some interesting cases, such as Burundi, Italy, the EU, and Northern Ireland. But these are secondary and of less interest in my search.
Step 4: Expanding your search terms

When you have completed this process you can search using other keywords/phrases, depending upon your selected topic: You want to find more work but not define the terms so broadly that you get a million items. If you get no references, it's too narrow. If you get hundreds, it's too wide. Like Goldilocks, there is a golden mean.

Eg try

‘consensus democracy’
‘Majoritarian democracy’
‘Lijphart and electoral systems’
‘electoral reform’
‘Lijphart and ethnic conflict’
‘electoral reform and Latin America’
‘Lijphart and Africa’
‘Lijphart and peace settlements’

etc etc
Step 5: Following the most useful abstracts and references

When you find a few articles which look very useful, you should pursue these in more depth. For example let's look at the Andreweg abstract:

This tells us how many references the article includes and how many people have cited the article (the most of the latter, the greater the impact and importance of the article.)

It tells us what is covered, what keywords were used to classify the piece, how to get the full text version, how to find related records, and even how to contact the author.
Step 6: Follow the citations…

One useful next step is to follow Andeweg’s citations. Click on Cited References and you get the following list. This provides a comprehensive list of nearly all the best literature published in recent years on consociationalism and Lijphart.

You can then click on any of the linked references to read the abstract, to download the full text, or to add to your marked list.

As a result, you have quickly assembled a comprehensive bibliography of work. Be selective, however, by reading in depth rather than by simply listing a lot of work which is irrelevant. Note that you want to develop an authoritative and selective guide to the reading to support your research and argument.
Step 7: Generating an automatic selected bibliography

When you have generated a marked list that you want to use, then go to the Web of Science top line menu buttons and click ‘Marked List’.

This gives you various options to print and save your list. You can simply copy and paste the list into any document. Or you can reformat it with various options, then print or email it to yourself etc. etc. There is always some final fiddling about to get the exported file into publishable format but it saves you hours of work retyping into your essay.

You can even export the records into professional software programs such as ProCite which are bibliographic tools.
Step 8: Optional: check recent work citing an author

One other option is that you can check recent work citing an author. To do this, click ‘Cited reference search’ on the screen in Step 1.

Type in the surname and first initial of the author.

This is another useful facility to see who is discussing the core theory that you have selected for your essay.

I hope that you found this guide useful and let me know if anything remains unclear. Try other facilities as well – these are just some of the most useful tips and tricks.

Pippa Norris

November 1, 2005