Library Jargon File

Following are a few common terms you’ll run across while searching databases and the catalog at the IUP Libraries. Being familiar with them will make your search much more efficient and less frustrating!

Abstract
a summary of an article; usually it will include a brief explanation of the problem, the research conducted, and the results found.

Bibliography
a collection of citations to articles, books, and other documents on a particular topic

Boolean Searching
searching using AND, OR, and NOT to link words together

Database
an electronic tool that collects citations to articles on particular topics (depending on the focus of the database) and allows them to be searched. Also called a bibliographic database.

Descriptor (or Subject)
a word used to indicate the subject or topic of the article; these are chosen from a list of approved subject terms developed by the database company

E-Journal
a journal that is published electronically or available electronically. At IUP, e-Journals are linked to our bibliographic databases.

Field
a section of a database record, e.g. the title is a field in the record

Limiter
a setting that restricts the database to only returning items that fit the specific limit (for instance, limiting by publication date)

Literature
a term used by librarians and researchers to refer to published material on a particular subject; there are usually three main divisions:
1. Primary literature: articles or other publications describing a specific experiment or research project; (examples include journal articles, conference papers, patents, dissertations)
2. Secondary literature: summaries, analysis, or commentary on primary sources, or tools pointing the way to primary research (examples include review articles, abstracts, bibliographies, and databases)
3. Tertiary literature: collections of information from primary and secondary literature; usually “accepted wisdom” (examples include dictionaries, encyclopedias, textbooks, and handbooks)

Peer-review
a process in which articles submitted to scholarly journals are read and reviewed by a set of experts in the specific topic of the article; these experts make comments and suggestions to the original author. If the article is approved, the journal subsequently publishes the article.

Record
a unit of information in a database – in a bibliographic database, a record would include all the information about a single article or paper

Scholarly Journal
a journal that publishes peer-reviewed articles from scholars and experts, as opposed to a magazine or newspaper (where the articles undergo editorial review, but not review by experts in the field)