



$$(a+b)^2 = a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$$

# HOW DO I CHOOSE A RESEARCH TOPIC?

## First, review your assignment



- How many pages are required?
- What types of sources do you need?
- How many sources do you need?

Then, pick a topic that interests you



- Pick a topic that interests you *and* is relevant to your course
- What would you like to learn more about?

Consult professors, classmates, librarians or course readings for ideas

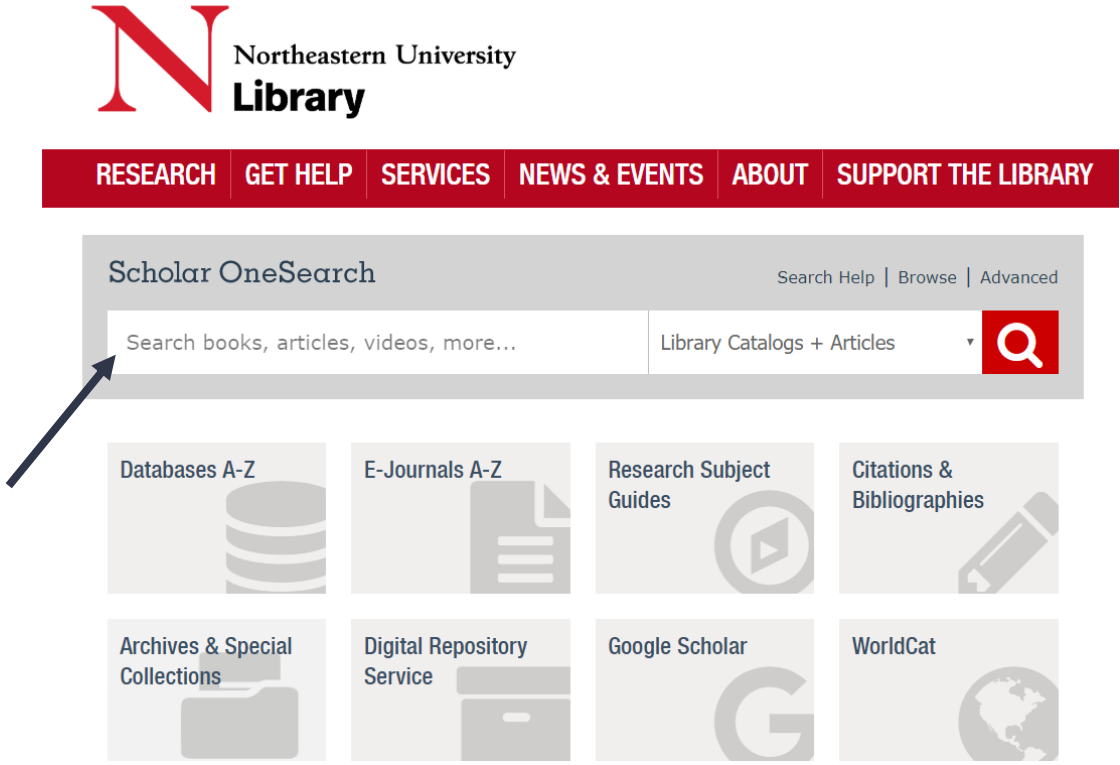


## Avoid topics that are too recent or too local



- If the topic is too recent or too local, you might not be able to find enough information to complete your assignment
- Scholarly research, for example, takes time to get published and won't be available for very recent topics

# Find out more about your topic



- To find background information about your topic, begin at the library homepage, [library.northeastern.edu](http://library.northeastern.edu).
- Enter your search terms in ScholarOneSearch to search for a variety of library resources.

# Find out more about your topic

The screenshot shows a search results page for the topic 'Infection'. On the left is a sidebar with filters. The main area displays five search results, each with a numbered icon and a document icon.

**Filter My Results**

Sort by Relevance ▼

Show Only ▲

Peer-reviewed Jo... (3,232,006)

**Full Text Online (4,219,022)**

Available in the Library (478)

**Material Type ▲**

- Articles (3,818,187)
- Newspaper Articles (1,069,417)
- Dissertations (212,937)
- Reviews (35,104)
- Text Resources (33,755)
- Reference Entries (18,631)**
- Other (15,885)
- Web Sites (14,130)
- Conference Proceedings (9,249)
- Books (7,893)
- Video and Audio (3,161)
- Technical Report (324)
- Journals (198)
- Government Documents (116)

**1** **JOURNAL**  
**Infection.**  
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Infektiologie.; P...  
infettive e tropicali.  
München : Urban & Vogel  
[Online access >](#)

**2** **GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT**  
**Infection**  
National Cancer Institute (U.S.)  
Bethesda, Md. : U.S. Dept. of Health and H...  
[Online access >](#)

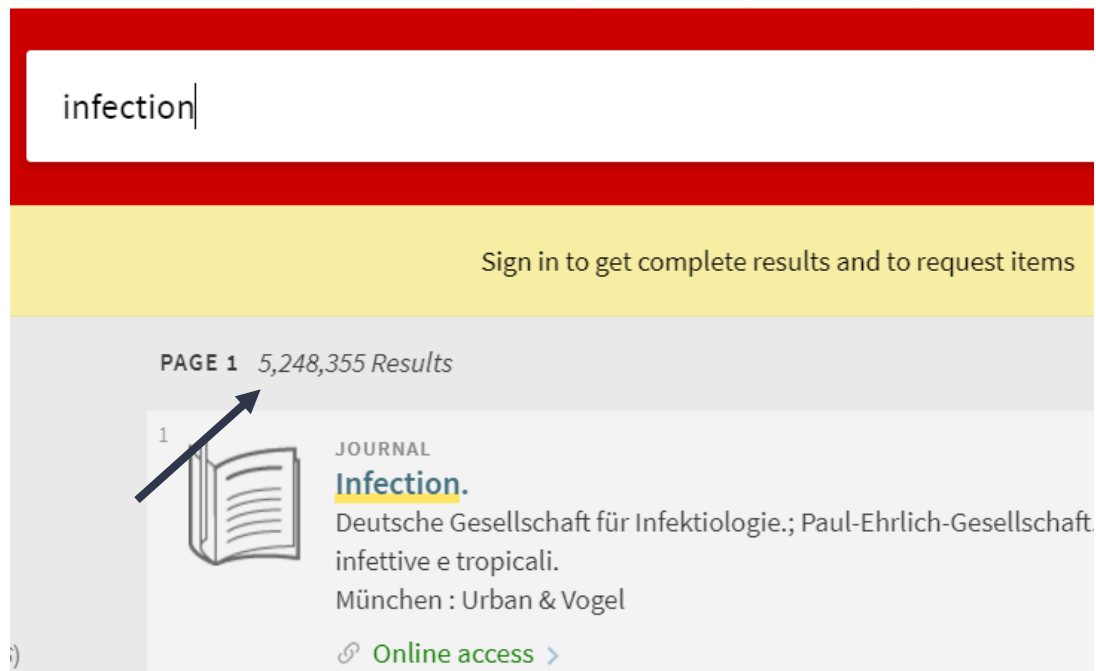
**3** **REFERENCE ENTRY**  
**Infection**  
The Gale Encyclopedia of Science, June, 2...  
“ . Williams. *Diseases of Infection*. Oxford/...  
[Check for full-text >](#)

**4** **ARTICLE / multiple sources exist. see all**  
**Infection**  
Mcnamara, Catherine  
Taylor & Francis Group  
Wasafiri, 01 September 2013, Vol.28(3), p.4...  
“ drink on to deaden the slamming. 48 In...  
[Full text available >](#)

**5** **ARTICLE / multiple sources exist. see all**  
**Infection**  
Miclau, Theodore ; Schmidt, Andrew H ; W...  
M... E...

- You will see results from many different types of sources, including books, journals, and newspapers.
- To the left of your results, select “Reference Entries” to limit to more general overviews of a topic.
- This exploration can help you identify a more specific aspect of the topic to focus on.

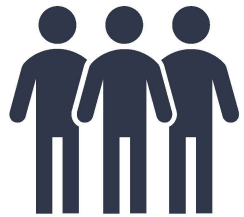
# Evaluate your results



- Once you've done some background research and have a basic topic in mind, evaluate your results: are you getting too many?
- Our initial search for "infection" has an overwhelming number of results and will need to be more focused.



Focus your topic with the 4 W's



Who?

What?



When?

Where  
?



## The 4 W's: Infections



Who: Nurses



What: Hand sanitizers



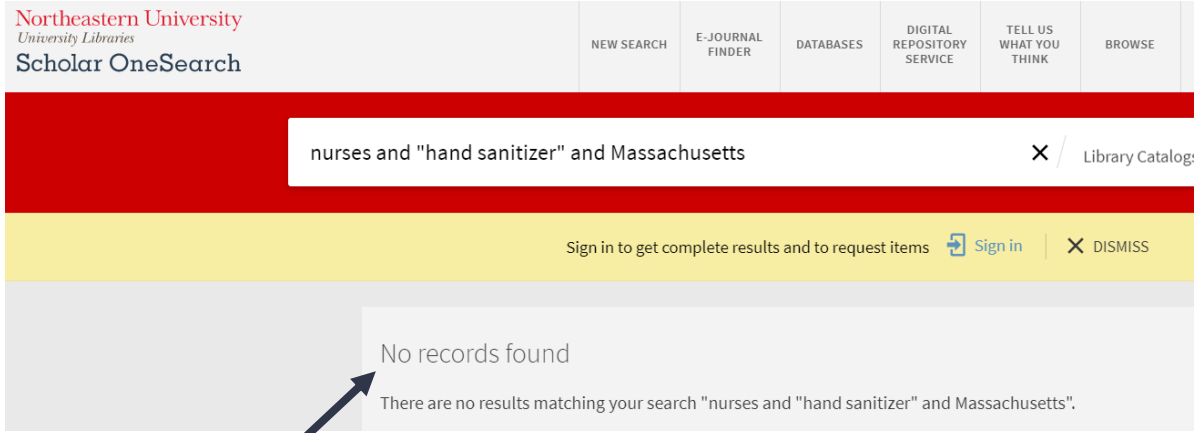
Where: Massachusetts



When: Last five years

- Here's an example of taking our original "infections" topic and making it narrower using the 4W's.

# Re-evaluate results



- The 4W's are an exercise to get you thinking about different ways to focus your topic.
- There's no need to use all 4W's in your final topic—that could limit your search too much.
- In this example, we focused on nurses and hand sanitizer use in Massachusetts and didn't retrieve any results. We've narrowed our topic too much.



Who: Nurses

- Health care personnel



What: Hand sanitizer

- handwashing or hand sanitizer

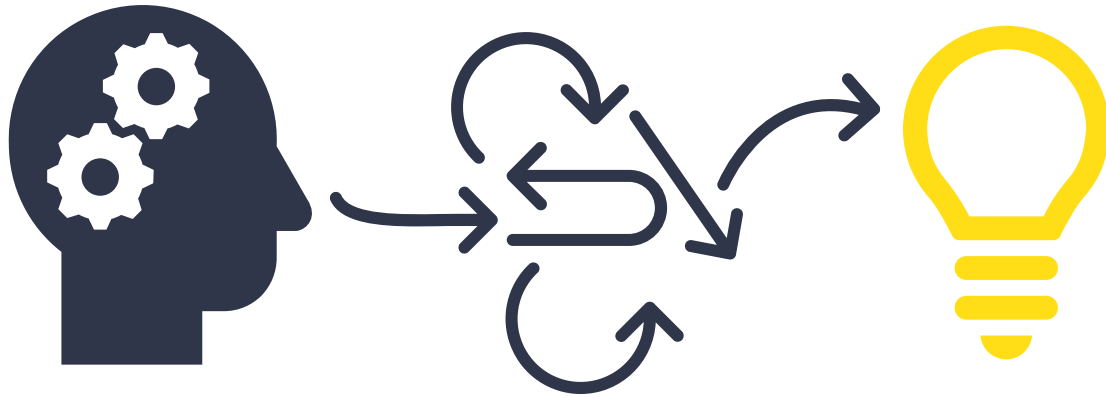


Where: Massachusetts

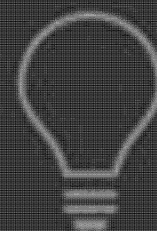
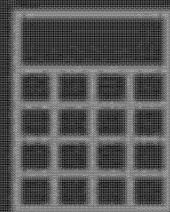
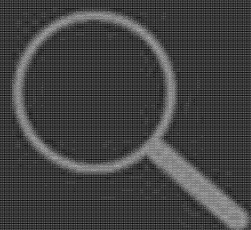
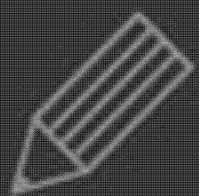
- United States

- To find enough results, we'll need to make our topic a bit broader.
- To the left are examples of how to broaden the *Who*, *What*, and *Where* of our topic

## Be flexible—research is a process



- You might need to adjust your topic several times as you test it out in the library databases. That's ok! It's a normal part of the research process.
- Be flexible and let the literature you find guide you in picking your topic.
- There might not be enough information about your original idea, so continue to adjust your topic until you find one that has enough information available and that you will be able to cover within the guidelines of your assignment.



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# ASK A LIBRARIAN

[library.northeastern.edu/ask](http://library.northeastern.edu/ask)