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Locating Tests and Measurement Instruments for Assessment

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Locating Tests and Measurement Instruments for Assessment

Abstract

Extension educators, staff, and specialists need to use surveys and other measurement instruments to assess their programming and conduct other research. Challenges in locating tests and measurement tools, however, include lack of time and lack of familiarity with techniques that can be used to find them. This article discusses library resources Extension staff can use for locating assessments along with search techniques and tips.

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Developing a good research instrument takes a significant amount of time and investigation. Radhakrishna (2007) laid out some excellent tips for developing new instruments. Rather than develop a new instrument, however, some researchers may be able to use or adapt an existing instrument. The key is finding such a resource. Many Extension staff are willing to share their assessment instruments with colleagues. However, locating assessment tools, such as tests, surveys, and other research instruments, can be a difficult task. These measurement tools can be hidden as attachments to journal articles or in open-access repositories, or they may not be published at all and may be obtainable only by writing to their authors. Others are available for purchase only, and most libraries do not actively purchase testing instruments due to expense and other concerns. To address the difficult task of finding assessment tools, we provide here a list of some of the best databases for locating research instruments along with tips for successful use of each of those databases. We also suggest questions and considerations to apply when searching for an appropriate research instrument and general strategies for conducting searches and using relevant library resources.

Library Databases

Table 1 lists databases Extension professionals will find useful for locating research instruments, with recommendations for performing a successful search of each. Although we recognize that land-grant institutions subscribe to different databases, we feel confident that this list is comprehensive enough that almost everyone should have access to at least some of the items on it. When searching, think about your population and what you want to measure to apply appropriate search terms (e.g., "attachment AND parents"). Most of the databases listed in Table 1 use official subject headings, and these may vary from one database to another. Be prepared to try a series of searches in each, adding, removing, or replacing terms on the basis of the quality and number of results.

Table 1.

Library Databases and Search Tips for Locating Measurement Instruments

Database title	Description	Tip(s)
CINAHL Complete	Includes medical research instruments, research validation, and research instrument utilization entries.	Enter your test topic. Then in the Publication Types box, select Questionnaire/Scale and/or Research Instrument . Run your query.
ETS Test Link	Contains more than 25,000 tests and measurements from the 1900s to present. (Permission is necessary for reuse and access to full texts.)	Use the Advanced search for full Boolean searching. Click the blue test links to determine whether ETS distributes the test or "e-order" displays.
HaPI (Health and Psychosocial Instruments)	Provides information about measurement instruments in health care and the psychosocial and behavioral sciences.	Use Primary Source to look for the original article in which an instrument was published or a source that contains the full text of the instrument. Use Secondary Source to look for articles that contain a particular instrument.
ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)	Contains citations, abstracts, and measurements related to the field of education.	Use ERIC Thesaurus to browse for tests, individual measures, scales, surveys, and questionnaires. In addition, under Search Options , select Publication Types , and click Tests/Questionnaires .
Mental Measurements Yearbook	Is a guide to over 2,000 contemporary testing instruments in psychology, education, and business available for purchase. (An Internet search on a measurement name can lead you to current pricing.)	If you already know the Tests in Print accession number, go to MMY , and search on the number preceded by the letters <i>AN</i> .
PsycINFO	Contains entries for psychological studies that include an abstract and the name of any instrument used, in the Tests and Measures field.	Enter the specific name of the research instrument in the TESTS & MEASURES textbox, or click Look up Test and Measure to search (OVID platform). You also can filter search results by

PsycTESTS	Provides access to psychological tests, measures, scales, surveys, and other assessment tools. PsycTESTS is a complementary database to PsycINFO and includes unique content.	choosing Classification Code 2220 Tests & Testing . On the Advanced search page, click the Full-Text Test box in the middle of the page to retrieve records that include the actual test.
PubMed	Is helpful for finding articles that discuss use of certain health measurement instruments.	Search by topic or by using the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) option. Combine a topic search with "questionnaires" [MeSH], "psychological tests" [MeSH], or "reproductability of results" [MeSH].

Finding an Appropriate Research Instrument

In addition to knowing where and how to search, you need to know your purpose for searching and what to do when you find what you are searching for. Attend to the following questions and considerations when searching for an appropriate research instrument for the population you are studying (Arvin, n.d.).

- Are you trying to find background information *about* a research instrument? Or are you trying to find and obtain *an actual copy of* the instrument?
- If you need information *about* a research instrument, what kind of information do you need? Do you need information on the instrument's structure, its content, its development, its psychometric reliability or validity, its validity for the population you are studying, or what?
- If you plan to obtain *an actual copy of* the instrument to use in research, you need to be concerned not only with obtaining the instrument but also with obtaining permission to use the instrument. Research instruments may be copyrighted. To obtain permission, contact the copyright holder in writing (hard copy or email).

Additional Strategies for Using Search Engines and Library Resources

- Locate a research article on a related topic, and identify the measurement instrument used by the author(s).
- Find out whether your library subscribes to Sage Research Methods Online. With this resource, you can find research method books and articles that you can use to explore concepts and methods applicable to designing research projects.
- Keep in mind that print measurement and test resources are still important. Items to consider consulting include *Measures for Clinical Practice and Research*, *Handbook of Family Measurement Techniques*, and other

handbooks available for various disciplines.

- Use Google. Doing a general Google search using advanced search techniques might garner some results (Hill, MacArthur, & Read, 2014), but you also might find instruments as appendixes to articles in Google Scholar. Search for an instrument by name to find articles that discuss it.
- Make use of your local librarian. Meeting with your local librarian can save you much time and energy in generating ideas about appropriate places to locate tests and measurements. Your librarian also can assist with developing a search strategy to locate articles that use a particular test.

Conclusion

We recognize that finding surveys, tests, and other research instruments invariably takes a certain amount of time and patience, but we hope this overview will help you streamline the process and more easily and quickly locate the right assessment tool. The first step is to determine which of the databases highlighted here your library subscribes to and then, using the provided tips, start exploring those databases. As the old saying goes, practice makes perfect, and we are confident that anyone who uses these resources repeatedly can become a power searcher. Remember, too, that if you are planning on locating and using an actual copy of an instrument, you will need to obtain the proper permissions. Finally, do not forget to consult a librarian when you have questions about your search—most land-grant libraries likely have at least one expert on staff who can guide you through your research and save you time and frustration.

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