

Working from a "Foothold" Article in the Health Care Literature: A Guide for Chaplains

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A productive way to explore a topic in the health care literature is to work out from any one article that captures your interest by using it as an initial "foothold" in the wider material. Each element of such an article may offer a pathway to new streams of thought on a subject.

ARTICLE ELEMENTS:

- 1) Date -- Was the article published more than a few years ago? If so, investigate it as an "old" source, and look for where it has been cited since. Cited Reference Databases (e.g., from the Web of Science/ISI Citation Index) allow for searches of where an article has been referenced subsequently. Look especially for later articles by the same author(s), as these may show either development in the ideas of the original work or pertinent application of those ideas. Sometimes a simple Google search of the article's title will give a fair sense of where the work has been cited.

Also, you should try to discern when the original article was actually written, which is usually at least a year before publication, often two years, and sometimes many years. Checking the date of the latest reference in an article can give a clue as to where the work stands in the overall development of ideas and discourse in the literature.
- 2) Author -- Find out what else the author has written by performing a name search in a general database like Pub Med/Medline or CINAHL Nursing. If the author has an academic affiliation, it is likely that he/she has an institutional faculty page that lists publications (and sometimes gives the person's complete Curriculum Vitae) –here, though, it's best to search within the institution's own website. Is the author affiliated with a special group within an institution? If so, that might reveal the author's surrounding "think tank" and other authors to look into.
- 3) Title -- An exact-match title search in Google can frequently give a quick sense of how popular the article is now, and it can suggest leads for additional searches.
- 4) Journal -- The journal in which the article was published has obviously shown some interest in the subject matter, so it's often worth looking at the table of contents from the particular issue and using the journal website's search function to see if there are other articles by the same author or articles using key subject terms of interest.
- 5) Terms/Concepts -- What are the *key* terms or concepts in the article that suggest specific words or phrases for use in searches? Some articles actually provide a short list below the abstract. Think about the conceptual "ancestry" and "pedigree" of the ideas in an article (--clues may be found especially in the author's introductory section and in how the author relates main points to previous work in the Discussion section).
- 6) Notes/References -- The original notes and references in an article may identify "classic" or foundational articles. A Cited Reference Database search of those older articles can open up parallel and branched streams of thought on a subject, for wider investigation.
- 7) Measures -- Does the article use research measures/questionnaires? If so, sources like the Health and Psychosocial Instruments (HAPI) database can be useful to gain insight into the measures themselves and other articles that have employed them (in addition to the citations for the measures that are given in the original article). Consider critically the specific measures that are used.
- 8) Contact Information -- Don't dismiss the possibility of contacting the author personally. It is now common practice for articles to give a "corresponding author" e-mail address, and writing a *brief* and to-the-point e-mail often gets a helpful response, particularly when an article has just been published and the work is fresh in the author's mind.