

OTA and NTA Tips

Old Testament Abstracts and New Testament Abstracts provide one-paragraph summaries of journal articles and essays about the Bible, biblical languages, and history and archaeology of the biblical era. Most important English language biblical studies journals and many non-English journals are included. Abstracts are always in English. Emphasis is on scholarly literature, but some popular magazines are included. OTA begins coverage in 1977; NTA begins in 1984 (but the paper volumes of NTA begin in 1956). Most but not all journals covered in OTA and NTA are also in ATLA.

We access OTA and NTA through EBSCO. See <http://library.dts.edu/Pages/RM/DBM/EBSCO/> for an introduction to generic EBSCO features. Some peculiarities of OTA and NTA are as follows.

Authors

Author's names are not entered in a consistent fashion, and first name is occasionally abridged to an initial. To compensate for both problems, browse by last name, comma, first initial, as follows.

Page: [Previous](#) | [Next](#) Browse an Index:
 Browse for:
 Select one or more terms and add to search using:

Term	Records Count
The term <i>merwe, c</i> would appear here had there been an exact match	
<input type="checkbox"/> MERWE, C. H. J. VAN DER	22
<input type="checkbox"/> MERWE, CHRISTO H. J. VAN DER	5
<input type="checkbox"/> MERWE, CHRISTO VAN DER	2
<input type="checkbox"/> MERWE, MICHIEL VAN DER	1
<input type="checkbox"/> MESHEL, NAPHTALI	1
<input type="checkbox"/> MESHEL, ZEEV	1

Hebrew and Greek Words

Since there are no standardized headings for Hebrew and Greek words, look for both vocalized and consonantal forms of Hebrew words, and inflected forms of Greek words. Use * and logical OR to match the common forms. Also consider alternate transliterations as appropriate. Here is a simple example with Hebrew kpr.

Add to Search	Search ID#	Search Terms	Limiters and Expanders	Actions	Delete
<input type="checkbox"/>	S3	 kpr or kipper		View Results (26) Revise Search View Details	<input type="button" value="X"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	S2	 kipper		View Results (12) Revise Search View Details	<input type="button" value="X"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	S1	 kpr		View Results (14) Revise Search View Details	<input type="button" value="X"/>

Subject Headings

Only a few subject headings are used in OTA, and they are all very broad, so subject searches are rarely precise enough to meet your needs. Here is a complete list of all the OTA subject headings. The list of subjects in NTA is slightly longer.

<input type="checkbox"/> ANCIENT NEAR EAST: HISTORY, TEXTS, ETC.	1010
<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHAEOLOGY, EPIGRAPHY, PHILOLOGY	6807
<input type="checkbox"/> BIBLICAL THEOLOGY	3422
<input type="checkbox"/> COMPUTER SOFTWARE	21
<input type="checkbox"/> FESTSCHRIFTEN AND COLLECTED ESSAYS	758
<input type="checkbox"/> GENERAL	2771
<input type="checkbox"/> HISTORICAL BOOKS	545
<input type="checkbox"/> HISTORICAL BOOKS: 1 CHRONICLES-2 MACCABEES	879
<input type="checkbox"/> HISTORICAL BOOKS: JOSHUA-2 KINGS	2261
<input type="checkbox"/> HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY	2573
<input type="checkbox"/> INTERTESTAMENTAL AND APOCRYPHA	785
<input type="checkbox"/> INTERTESTAMENTAL, APOCRYPHA, NT USE	446
<input type="checkbox"/> INTERTESTAMENTAL, APOCRYPHA, NT USE: OTHER WRITINGS/TRADITIONS	1000
<input type="checkbox"/> INTERTESTAMENTAL, APOCRYPHA, NT USE: QUMRAN	1691
<input type="checkbox"/> INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL	1711
<input type="checkbox"/> LITERARY FORMS/TECHNIQUES & METHODS OF STUDY	654
<input type="checkbox"/> MAJOR PROPHETS	3174
<input type="checkbox"/> MINOR PROPHETS	1656
<input type="checkbox"/> PENTATEUCH	597
<input type="checkbox"/> PENTATEUCH: EXODUS-DEUTERONOMY	1940
<input type="checkbox"/> PENTATEUCH: GENESIS	2287
<input type="checkbox"/> PROPHETS	834
<input type="checkbox"/> TEXTS, MANUSCRIPTS, VERSIONS, CANON	616
<input type="checkbox"/> VARIA	239
<input type="checkbox"/> WRITINGS	663
<input type="checkbox"/> WRITINGS: JOB-SIRACH	2340
<input type="checkbox"/> WRITINGS: PSALMS	2020

A subject search for “covenant,” for example, will fail because there is no such subject heading.

Ordinarily you will want to search the keyword or default fields, not subjects.

Improving Precision and Relevance

One way to improve precision is to use exact phrases or proximity operators rather than logical “AND.” So, for example, you could “OR” the following phrases

“literary criticism” or “rhetorical criticism”
rather than using the following expression.
(literary or rhetorical) and criticism

Of course increased precision means decreased completeness/thoroughness.

Abstracts often contain words that correspond to concepts only tangentially addressed in the journal articles. You may want articles that **focus** on a specific issue. To do that, limit your search to title words. Often this will sharply reduce the number of records retrieved, while retaining a significant fraction of the articles focused on the topic. See following example.

Add to Search	Search ID#	Search Terms	Limiters and Expanders	Actions	Delete
<input type="checkbox"/>	S2	 TI COVENANT* OR TREATY OR TREATIES		View Results (278) Revise Search View Details	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	S1	 COVENANT* OR TREATY OR TREATIES		View Results (2057) Revise Search View Details	<input type="checkbox"/>

Improving Completeness/Thoroughness

To increase completeness, “OR” many synonyms together. Below is an example of using synonyms in a search on textual criticism of Jeremiah.

Add to Search	Search ID#	Search Terms	Limiters and Expanders	Actions	Delete
<input type="checkbox"/>	S1	 (JER OR JEREMIAH) AND (TEXTUAL CRITIC* OR TEXT CRITIC* OR MANUSCRIPT* OR EMEND* OR RECENSION OR LXX OR SEPTUAGINT* OR VORLAGE OR VARIANT* OR MT OR MASSORETIC OR PESHITTA)		View Results (365) Revise Search View Details	<input type="checkbox"/>

When you are trying to be thorough, search for each word separately and get the statistics, then decide whether to use that word in a final combined search. Search History is an easy way to combine prior searches.

Bible passages

The Scripture Citation Index is incomplete but useful. See ATLA tips for instructions on using the SC browse or search features. To be extra through, also use keyword search with full book name, abbreviation(s), and perhaps even non-English terminology.

Warning: the following does not work as desired.

John 4 or jn 4

But the following does work as desired.

john 4 or "jn 4"

Do you see what is wrong? Note the use of quotation marks. JN 4 without quotes is interpreted as the field code JN followed by a 4; it searches the journal field for the word “4” and finds nothing because there are no journals with the word 4 in the title. JN is the only abbreviation for a book of the bible that matches a field code.

Ambiguity is occasionally a problem when you are searching abstracts and titles for books of the Bible. For example, a search for “John” matches many articles on the gospel, but it also matches an article entitled “John Calvin and the Sensus Literalis” and other irrelevant works. This is not much of a problem when you are searching for a specific passage (John 10) but it can be a significant problem when you are searching for a topic or theme in a book (e.g. John and faith). In such cases, it is helpful to browse subject and pick the broad subject heading for your passage (e.g. “Gospels--Acts” in this case.) Combine this with your search terms. It will increase precision a little.

