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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Records Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The term merwe, c would appear here had there been an exact match</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERWE, C. H. J. VAN DER</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERWE, CHRISTO H. J. VAN DER</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERWE, CHRISTO VAN DER</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERWE, MICHEIL VAN DER</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESHEL, NAPHTALI</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESHEL, TEB</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Add to Search</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
<th>Limiters and Expanders</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Delete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>kpr or kipper</td>
<td>View Results</td>
<td>Revise Search</td>
<td>View Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>kipper</td>
<td>View Results</td>
<td>Revise Search</td>
<td>View Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>kpr</td>
<td>View Results</td>
<td>Revise Search</td>
<td>View Details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

- ANCIENT NEAR EAST: HISTORY, TEXTS, ETC. 1010
- ARCHAEOLOGY, EPIGRAPHY, PHILOLOGY 6807
- BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 3422
- COMPUTER SOFTWARE 21
- FESTSCHRIFTEN AND COLLECTED ESSAYS 750
- GENERAL 2771
- HISTORICAL BOOKS 2545
- HISTORICAL BOOKS: 1 CHRONICLES-2 MACCABEES 5870
- HISTORICAL BOOKS: JOSHUA-2 KINGS 2261
- HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY 2573
- INTERTESTAMENTAL AND APOCRYPHA 785
- INTERTESTAMENTAL, APOCRYPHA, NT USE 446
- INTERTESTAMENTAL, APOCRYPHA, NT USE: OTHER WRITINGS/TRADITIONS 1000
- INTERTESTAMENTAL, APOCRYPHA, NT USE: QUMRAN 1091
- INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL 1711
- LITERARY FORMS/TECHNIQUES & METHODS OF STUDY 674
- MAJOR PROPHETS 3174
- MINOR PROPHETS 1560
- PENTATEUCH 637
- PENTATEUCH: EXODUS-DEUTERONOMY 1840
- PENTATEUCH: GENESIS 2287
- PROPHETS 834
- TEXTS, MANUSCRIPTS, VERSIONS, CANON 616
- VARIA 239
- WRITINGS 683
- WRITINGS: JOB-SIRACH 2340
- 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Add to Search</th>
<th>Search IDs</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
<th>Limiters and Expanders</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Delete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>TI COVENANT* OR TREATY OR TREATIES</td>
<td>View Results (276)</td>
<td>Revise Search</td>
<td>View Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>COVENANT* OR TREATY OR TREATIES</td>
<td>View Results (207)</td>
<td>Revise Search</td>
<td>View Details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Add to Search</th>
<th>Search IDs</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
<th>Limiters and Expanders</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Delete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>(JER OR JEREMIAH) AND (TEXTUAL CRITIC* OR TEXT CRITIC* OR MANUSCRIPT* OR EMEND* OR RECEPTION OR LXX OR SEPTUAGINT* OR VORLAGE OR VARIANT* OR MT OR MASSORETIC OR PESHITTA)</td>
<td>View Results (256)</td>
<td>Revise Search</td>
<td>View Details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 thorough, 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.