INTRODUCTION TO OTA AND NTA

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Old Testament Abstracts and New Testament Abstracts provide one-paragraph summaries of articles and books about the Bible and its backgrounds. 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 the EBSCO interface. See https://library.dts.edu/ebsco-intro for an introduction to generic EBSCO features. Here we do not explain how to use the EBSCO search engine; we only address peculiarities and problems you may experience with OTA/NTA.

Authors

In NTA only initials of authors’ first names were given until 2013. Now they are written out. In OTA authors’ names were written out from the beginning. To compensate for inconsistencies in both databases, browse by last name, comma, first initial, as follows.

![Browse Author Screen](image)

Figure 10: Browse Author Screen

Greek and Hebrew 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

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1 This introduction assumes that you are already familiar with “Basic Concepts for Database Searching” (https://library.dts.edu/basic-concepts). In this introduction, sample search statements are typographically distinguished by paired angle brackets like this: << search statement here >>.
OR to match the common forms. Also consider alternative transliterations as appropriate. Here is a simple example with Hebrew kpr.

![Search interface](image)

Figure 110: Browse transliterated Hebrew term

**Subject Headings**

Only a few subject headings are used in OTA, and they are all very broad. Here is a complete list of all the OTA subject headings. The list of subjects in NTA is about four times as long.

- ancient near east: history, texts, etc. (2,568)
- ancient near east: texts, traditions, etc. (37)
- archaeology, epigraphy, philology (10,284)
- biblical theology (4,946)
- computer software (21)
- festschriften and collected essays (1,049)
- general (3,599)
- historical books (890)
- historical books: 1 chronicles-2 maccabees (1,076)
- historical books: joshua-2 kings (4,199)
- history and geography (3,997)
- intertestamental and apocrypha (785)
- intertestamental, apocrypha, nt use (747)
- intertestamental, apocrypha, nt use: other writings/traditions (2,884)
- intertestamental, apocrypha, nt use: qumran (2,877)
- introduction and general (2,563)

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So a search for “Elisha” as subject fails. You will usually want to pick “keyword” or accept the EBSCO default (“Select a field”) when you search.

**Improving Precision and Relevance**

One way to improve precision is to use exact phrases or proximity operators rather than logical “AND.” So, for example, instead of << (literary OR rhetorical) AND criticism >> you could “OR” the following phrases: << “literary criticism” OR “rhetorical criticism” >>.

Ambiguity can be a problem when you are searching abstracts and titles. For example, a search for << dan >> retrieves material about the tribe of dan as well as the book of Daniel (because abstracts use “dan” to abbreviate “Daniel”). 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. Note the difference between 481 items found and 3,423 found in the following example.
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.

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 menu includes a “Scripture” option just like ATLA, and it works the same way. So you might search for << SC Jeremiah 31* >>. See the Introduction to ATLA ([https://library.dts.edu/atla-intro](https://library.dts.edu/atla-intro)) for instructions. Unlike ATLA, there is no SR index (as of Sept. 2020).

The Scripture option is often sufficient, but it is not exhaustive. To be extra thorough, also use keyword search with full book name and common abbreviation(s). For example: << “jer 31*” OR “Jeremiah 31*” OR ( jeremiah AND “new covenant” ) >>.