

INTRODUCTION TO OTA AND NTA¹

By Marvin Hunn

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 an Index:

Browse for:

Page: [Previous](#) [Next](#)

Select one or more terms and add to search using:

Term	Records Count
The term(s) you entered could not be found. The list below is in alphabetical order.	
<input type="checkbox"/> merwe, c. h. j. der.	1
<input type="checkbox"/> merwe, c. h. j. van der.	24
<input type="checkbox"/> merwe, c. j. van der.	1
<input type="checkbox"/> merwe, christo h. j. van der.	16
<input type="checkbox"/> merwe, christo van der.	2
<input type="checkbox"/> merwe, michiel van der.	1

Figure 100: 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

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.

<input type="checkbox"/> Select / deselect all <input type="button" value="Search with AND"/> <input type="button" value="Search with OR"/> <input type="button" value="Delete Searches"/>			
Search ID#	Search Terms	Search Options	Actions
<input type="checkbox"/> S3	 kpr OR kipper	Expanders - Apply equivalent terms from thesaurus if available Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	 View Results (43)
<input type="checkbox"/> S2	 kipper	Expanders - Apply equivalent terms from thesaurus if available Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	 View Results (16)
<input type="checkbox"/> S1	 kpr	Expanders - Apply equivalent terms from thesaurus if available Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	 View Results (27)

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.

<input type="checkbox"/> ancient near east: history, texts, etc.	2,568
<input type="checkbox"/> ancient near east: texts, traditions, etc.	37
<input type="checkbox"/> archaeology, epigraphy, philology	10,284
<input type="checkbox"/> biblical theology	4,946
<input type="checkbox"/> computer software	21
<input type="checkbox"/> festschriften and collected essays	1,649
<input type="checkbox"/> general	3,599
<input type="checkbox"/> historical books	890
<input type="checkbox"/> historical books: 1 chronicles-2 maccabees	1,676
<input type="checkbox"/> historical books: joshua-2 kings	4,199
<input type="checkbox"/> history and geography	3,997
<input type="checkbox"/> intertestamental and apocrypha	785
<input type="checkbox"/> intertestamental, apocrypha, nt use	747
<input type="checkbox"/> intertestamental, apocrypha, nt use: other writings/traditions	2,884
<input type="checkbox"/> intertestamental, apocrypha, nt use: qumran	2,877
<input type="checkbox"/> introduction and general	2,563

(Continued next page.)

<input type="checkbox"/> literary forms/techniques & methods of study	997
<input type="checkbox"/> literary forms/techniques and methods of study	253
<input type="checkbox"/> major prophets	5,649
<input type="checkbox"/> minor prophets	2,754
<input type="checkbox"/> pentateuch	990
<input type="checkbox"/> pentateuch: exodus-deuteronomy	3,559
<input type="checkbox"/> pentateuch: genesis	4,197
<input type="checkbox"/> prophets	1,311
<input type="checkbox"/> texts, manuscripts, versions, canon	1,576
<input type="checkbox"/> varia	239
<input type="checkbox"/> writings	1,039
<input type="checkbox"/> writings: job-sirach	3,973
<input type="checkbox"/> writings: psalms	3,461

Figure 120: Browse subject

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.

Searching: [Old Testament Abstracts](#) | [Choose Databases](#)

Select a Field (optional)
▼

Figure 130: Search default fields

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.

Search ID#	Search Terms	Search Options	Actions
S2	 TI covenant* or treaty or treaties	Expanders - Apply equivalent terms from thesaurus if available Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	 View Results (481)
S1	 covenant* or treaty or treaties	Expanders - Apply equivalent terms from thesaurus if available Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	 View Results (3,423)

Figure 140: Using title field for precision

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.

Search Terms	Search Options	Actions
 (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)	Expanders - Apply equivalent terms from thesaurus if available Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	 View Results (684)

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>) 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”) >>.