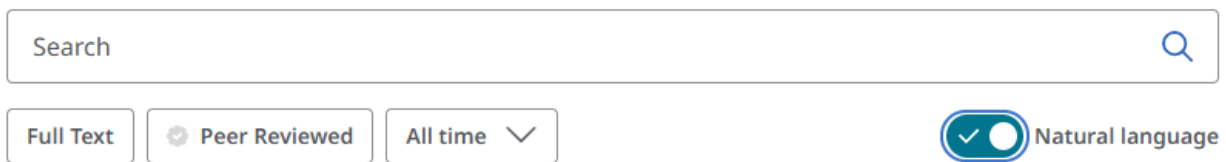


NATURAL LANGUAGE SEARCHING IN EBSCO DATABASES

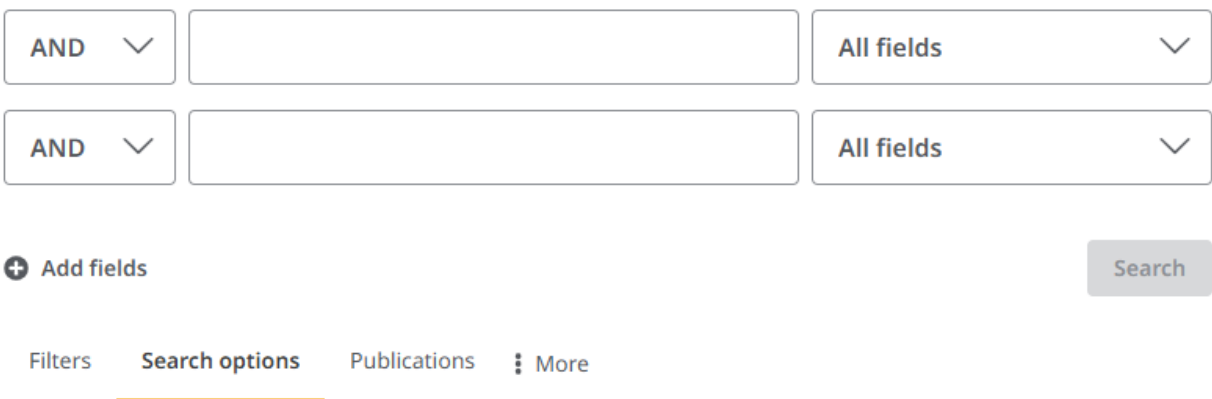
EBSCO has added an optional AI feature to its search engine that provides a more Google-like experience. The new AI feature is called “Natural Language” Search Mode.

To activate it from the Basic Search screen, just pick the Natural Language option. See image below. (The “Natural Language” button sometimes appears on the left margin and sometimes appears on the right margin, depending on the sequence of steps you take to get to the page, and the width of the device you are using to display the screen.)



A screenshot of the Basic Search interface. At the top is a search bar with the placeholder text "Search" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar are three filter buttons: "Full Text", "Peer Reviewed" (with a checkmark icon), and "All time" (with a dropdown arrow). To the right of these buttons is a toggle switch labeled "Natural language", which is currently turned on (blue with a white checkmark).

To activate it from the Advanced Search Screen, pick the Search Options tab → Search Modes → Natural language. See image below.



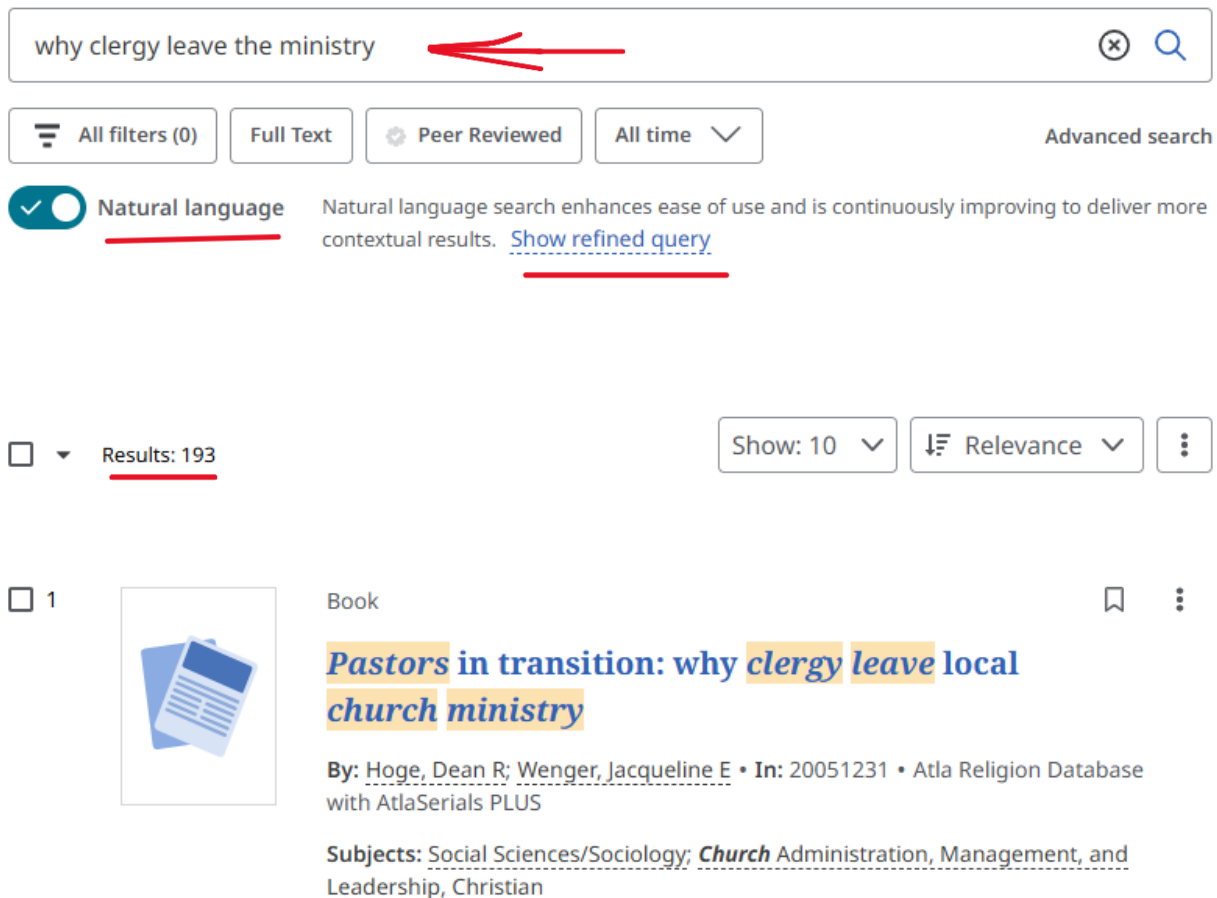
A screenshot of the Advanced Search interface. It shows two rows of search criteria, each with a dropdown menu set to "AND", an empty text input field, and a dropdown menu set to "All fields". Below these is a button labeled "+ Add fields". To the right is a "Search" button. At the bottom, there is a horizontal tab bar with four options: "Filters", "Search options" (which is highlighted with an orange underline), "Publications", and "More" (with a vertical ellipsis icon). Below the tab bar, under the "Search options" tab, is a section titled "Search modes" with a "Reset" link on the right. There are four radio button options: "Proximity", "Find all my search terms", "Find any of my search terms", and "Natural language" (which is selected with a blue dot).

Natural Language search mode helps you formulate a search statement. Just supply a prompt consisting of a simple phrase, or a few sentences describing what you want.

Then click the search icon. The NL feature will identify the key concepts in the prompt, select various synonyms that can be used to express the concepts, formulate a traditional search statement, search, and show the results. By “traditional” we mean a search statement that uses logical operators like AND or proximity operators like NEAR. EBSCO Natural Language search mode is not using state-of-the-art vector space retrieval such as you might get with OpenAI's ChatGPT, Anthropic's Claude, or Google's Gemini. (Interestingly, EBSCO does use Claude for its AI Insights feature which lists key ideas from an article.)

Depending on how you use it, the EBSCO AI can help you be more precise or more thorough in your searching. And it frequently reduces the amount of time it takes to find good search terms.

In the example below we provide the prompt <<why clergy leave the ministry>>. The search engine formulates a search and displays a list of 193 items.



In the image above, note the “Show refined query” link which offers to display the actual query (search statement). The search statement is displayed in image below.

**Natural language**

Natural language search enhances ease of use and is continuously improving to deliver more contextual results.

((clergy OR pastor OR minister) AND (leave OR resign OR depart) AND (ministry OR church OR congregation)) [Show less](#)

The search statement is:

(pastor OR clergy OR minister)
AND (leave OR resign OR quit)
AND (ministry OR church OR congregation)

So AI analyzed the prompt, identified three concepts, provided three terms for each concept, and formulated a search statement. That search statement might or might not be adequate to meet your needs.

You can edit the search statement as needed to improve it. For example, if you wanted a more comprehensive search, you could experiment with the following additional terms.

Possible terms for the concept of pastors/ministers

clergy* OR pastor* OR priest* OR minister* OR preacher*
OR ex-pastor* OR ex-clergy* OR ex-priest* OR ex-minister*

For the concept of leaving/departure

Relocation OR quit OR leave OR resign* OR "voluntary exit"
OR attrition OR turnover OR "career change"

For the concept of ministry

ministry OR pastorate OR church OR parish OR congregation
OR job OR position OR career OR employment OR unemployed

Of course, precise retrieval and thorough retrieval are inversely related. The more complete the search, the less precise the results.

Whenever you use AI features of any kind, always assess the results and help the AI as needed. **Never accept results without assessment.** Think.

Here are a few warnings.

1. Do not use the Natural Language option to search the Atla Religion Database for a specific chapter in the bible. Instead use the SR (scripture reference) field code and the following format.

SR "John 3"

SR "Corinthians, 1st 10"

The Natural Language mode can search for specific chapter and verse, and sometimes it works well, but often it performs poorly. The SR approach is reliable and consistent.

2. In our very limited testing, the Natural Language option sometimes behaved irregularly when our prompt was only one or two words. Sometimes the system did not reveal what search statement was used when NL was chosen. Sometimes it revealed the search statement and it was just two words; NL did not supply extra synonyms. << pistis Christou >> is one example.
3. In our very limited testing, the NL option choked on large prompts. For example, when we used article abstracts as prompts, the system found nothing and suggested we simplify. It failed to identify the main idea of the abstract. That is something general AI (like ChatGPT or Claude) can do, so we expect improvement in this area.