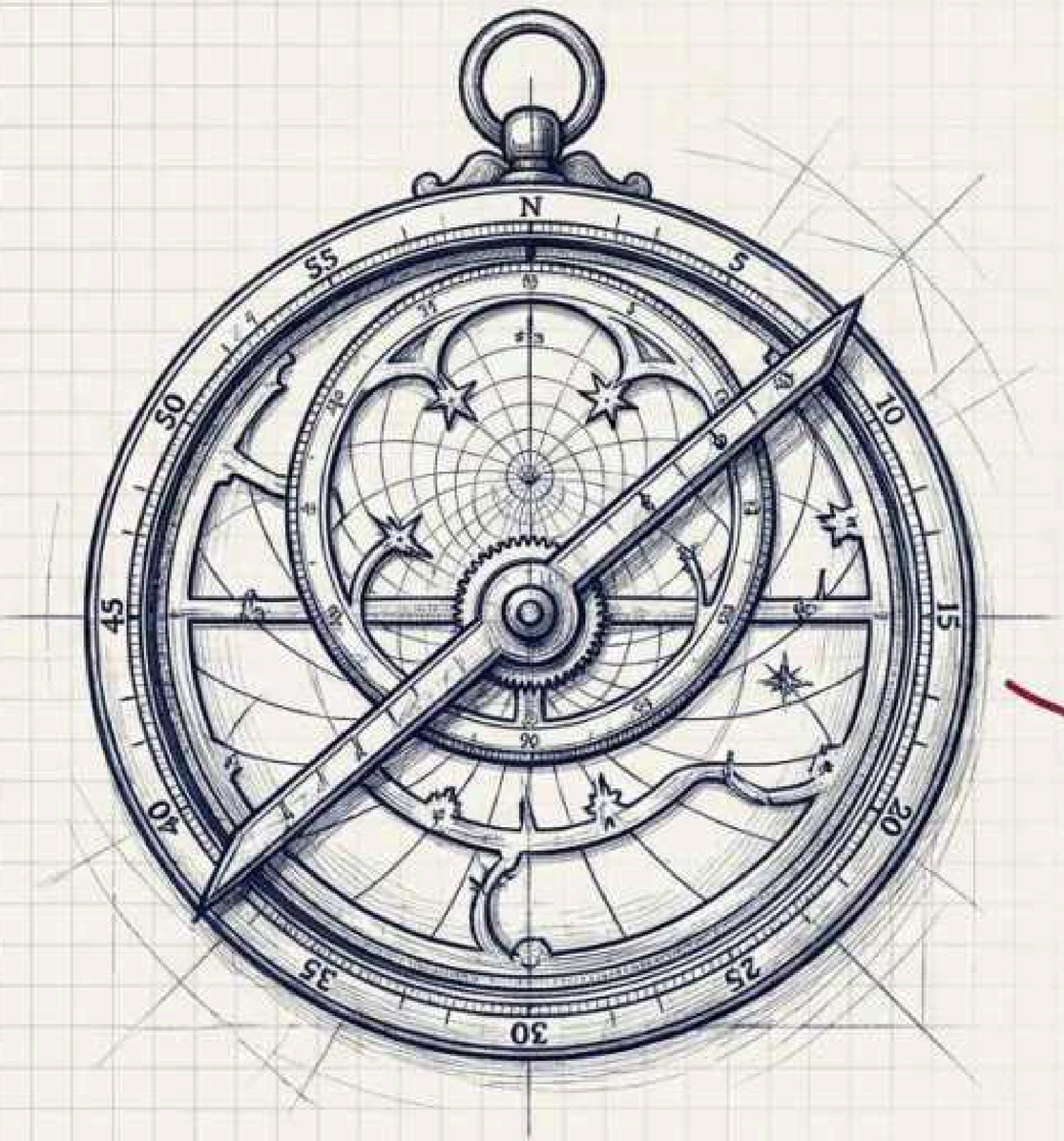


Finding Sources

Library databases, Boolean searches, following citations, and using AI search tools with care.

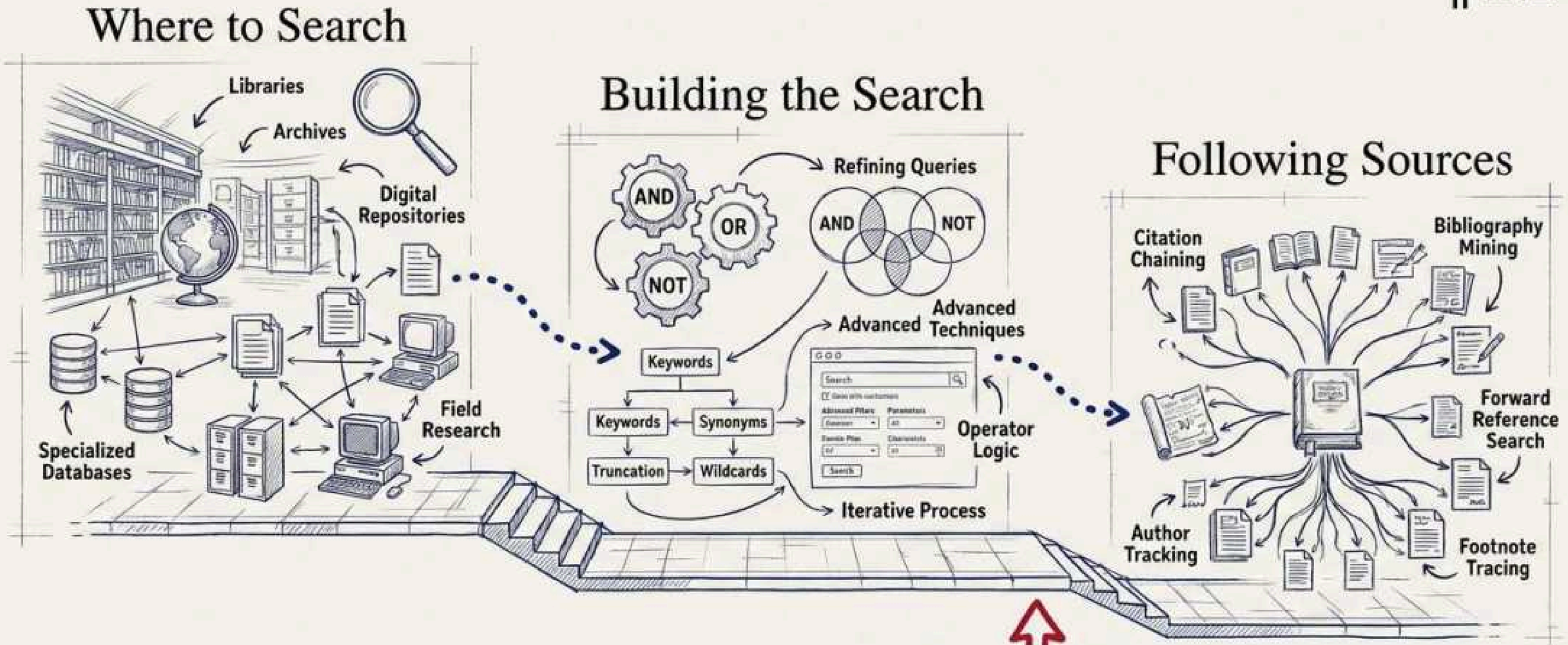
Strategic Navigation for Knowledge

Methodical Approach > Serendipity

Define Topic → Identify Keywords (Boolean) → Select Database/Tool

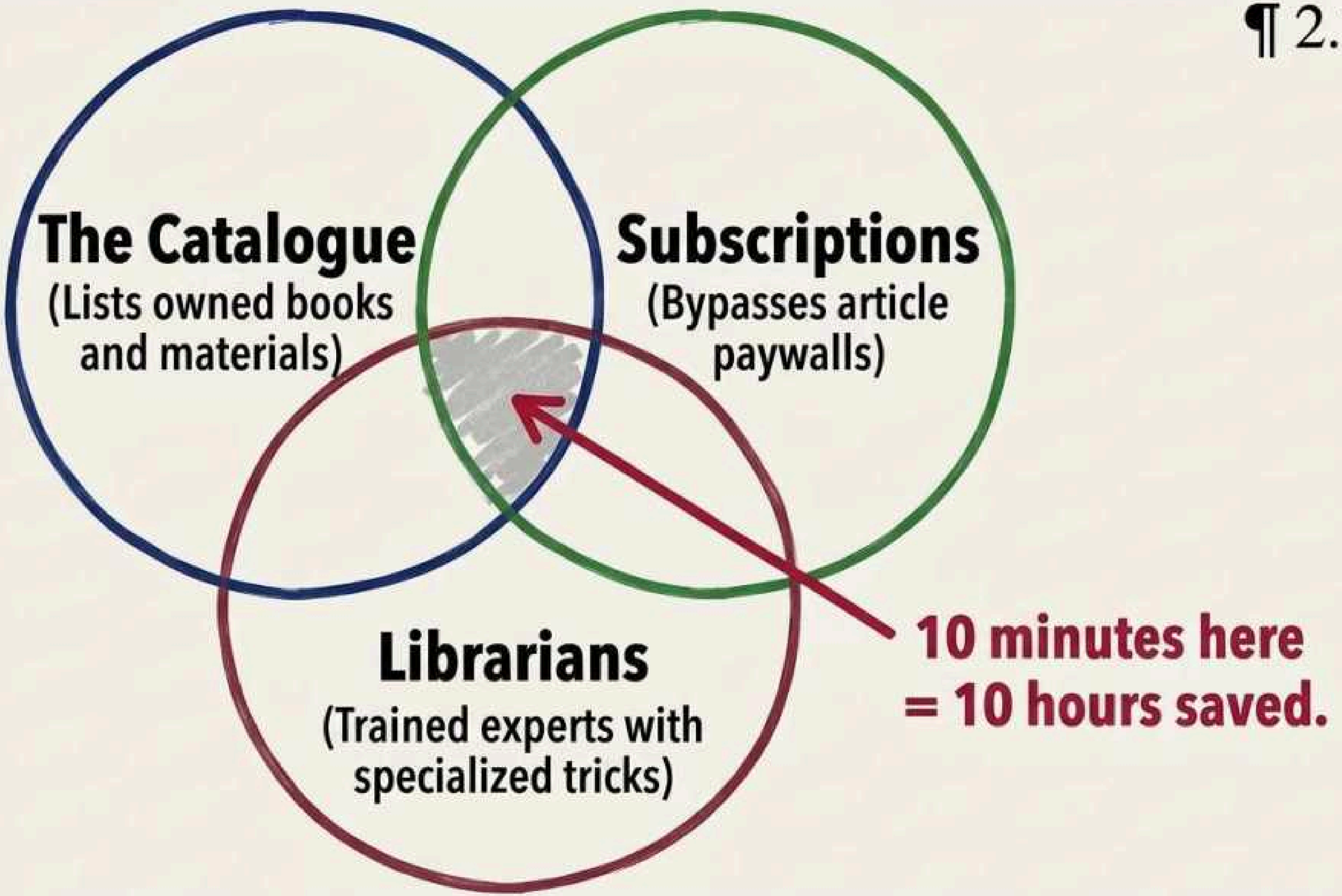
Evaluate & Refine

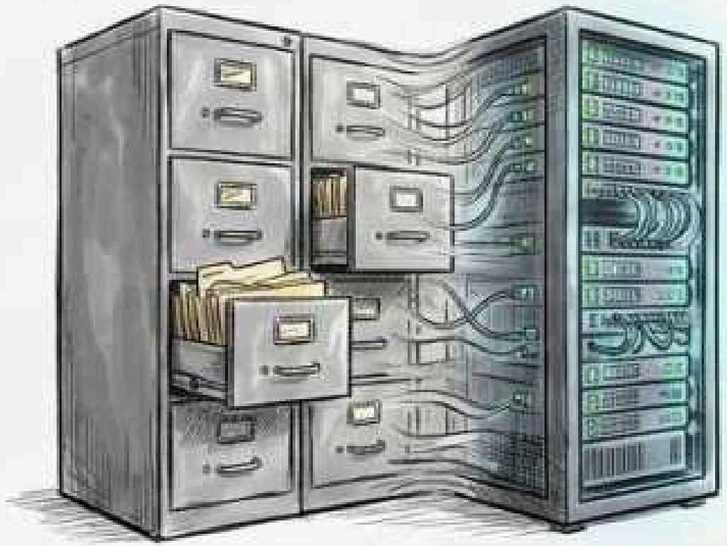
⚠ AI Tools: Verify Results



You have a question and a plan.
Finding sources is a deliberate skill.

The Gap: Most people use only a fraction of available techniques.


The Catalogue
(Lists owned books and materials)
Subscriptions
(Bypasses article paywalls)
Librarians
(Trained experts with specialized tricks)
10 minutes here
= 10 hours saved.



General Humanities

JSTOR

Covers many fields in humanities and social sciences.

Specialized Sciences

PubMed

Covers medicine and life sciences.

Check your library website to match the database to your specific question—**do not** search blindly.

Google Scholar

The Benefits

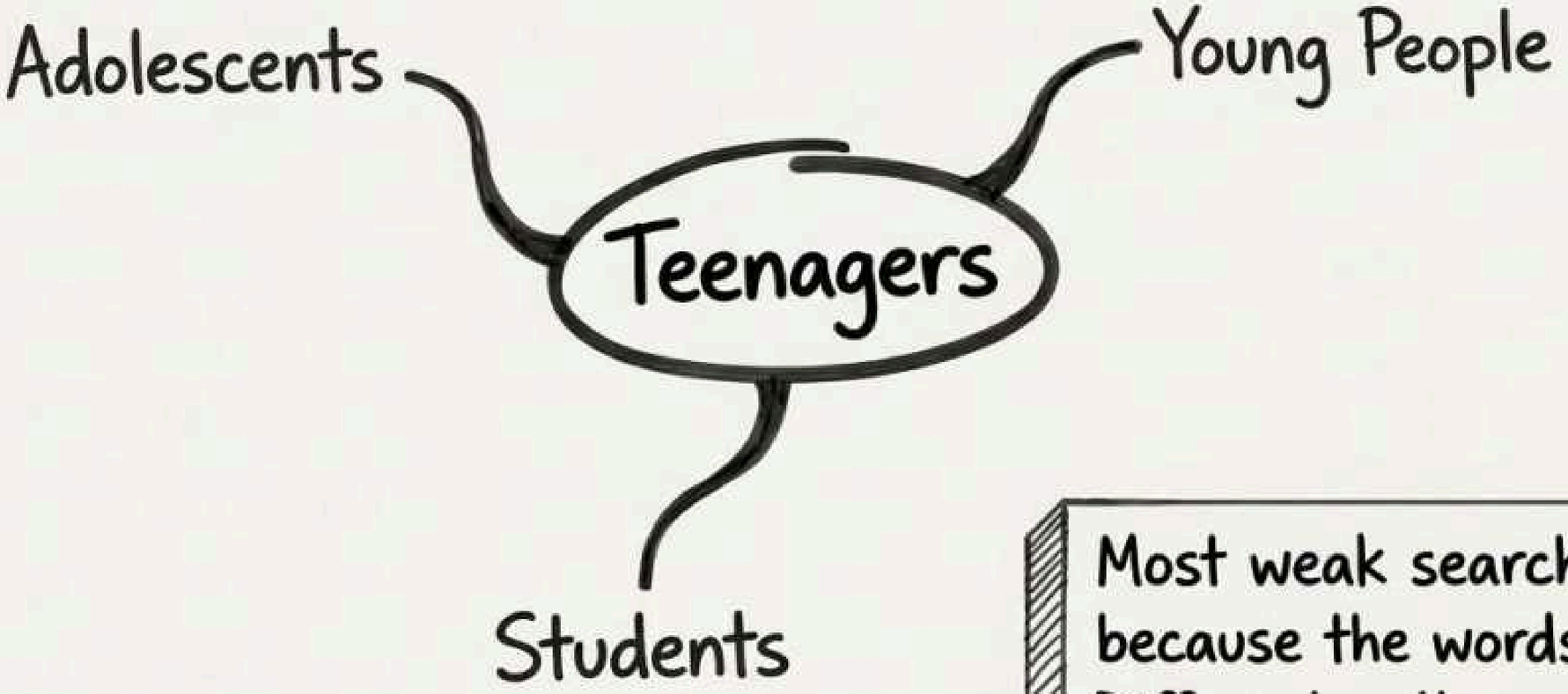
- Free & Fast
- Searches across fields
- Shows citation counts



The Risks

- Less organized
- Hits subscription paywalls

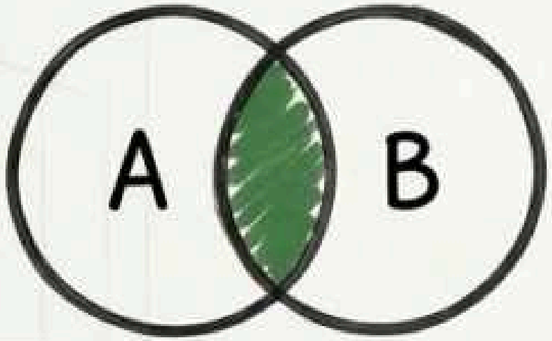
Your library can often supply the paywalled articles you discover here.



Most weak searches fail because the words are wrong. Different authors use different words for the same idea. Capture all their vocabularies.

Boolean Algebra

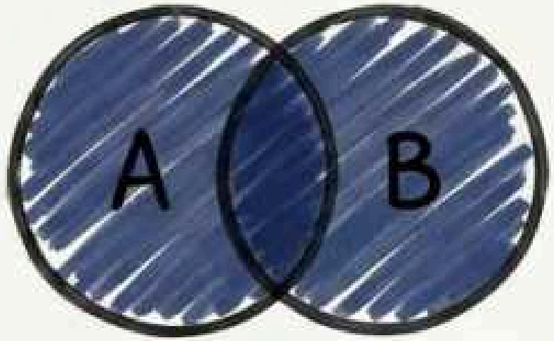
$A \cap B$



AND

Narrows search—
both must appear.

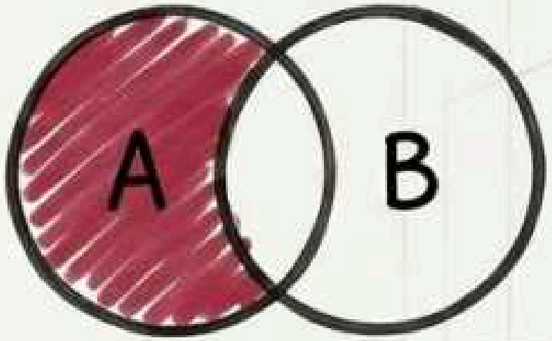
$A \cup B$



OR

Widens search—
either will do.

$A \setminus B$



NOT

Excludes a term.

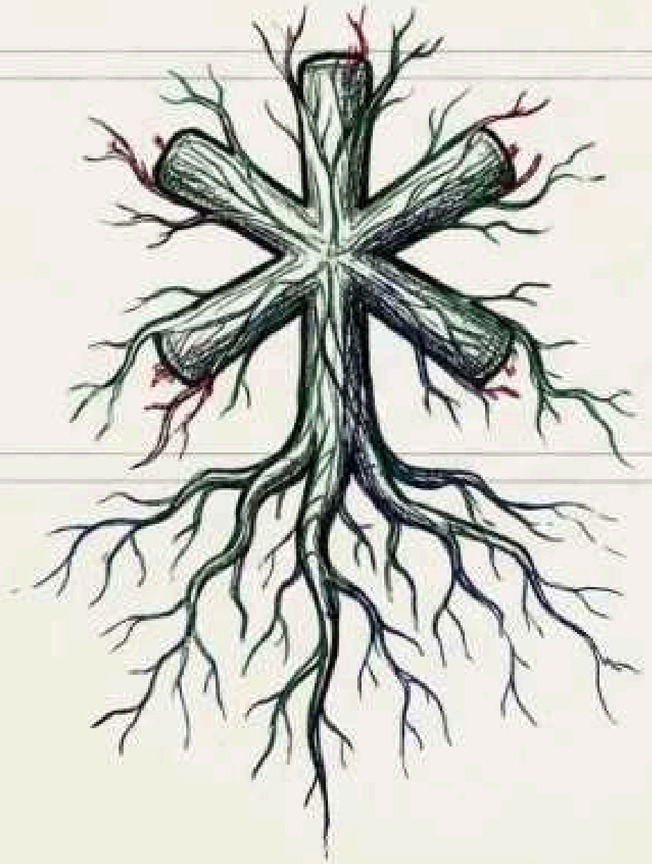
$$(\text{Adolescents} \cup \text{Teenagers}) \cap \text{Smartphones}$$

Parentheses group your terms, just like algebra.
Without brackets, databases misread the search.

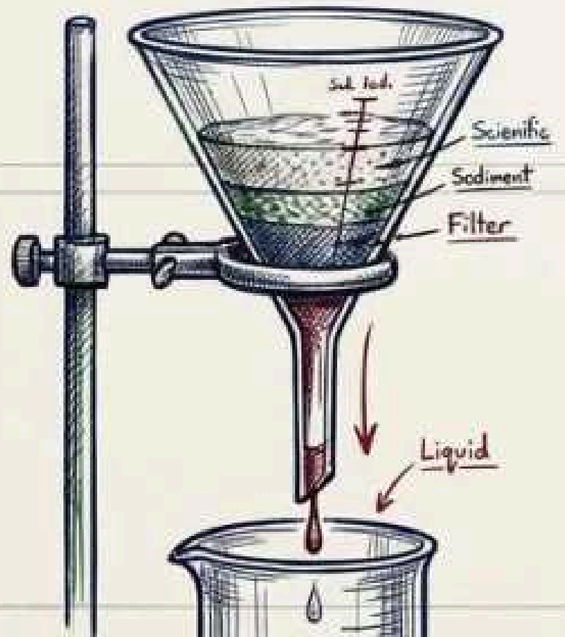
Search Modifier Toolkit



Locks in **exact phrases** in exact order.

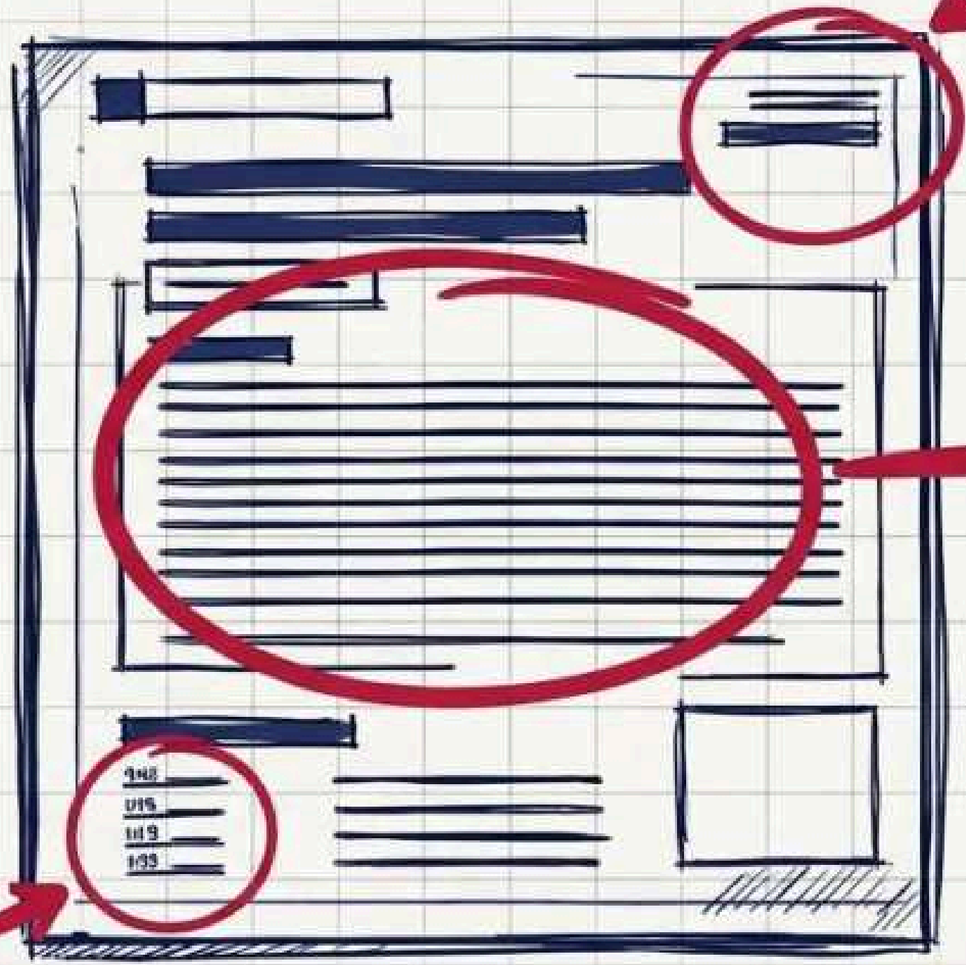


Catches word endings (e.g., teen* finds teen, teens, teenager).



Filters by **date, subject**, or **source type**. Start broad, then narrow.

Anatomy of a Search Result



Date & Journal Name

Recent + Respected =
Needs a closer look.

Abstract

1 minute reading =
1 hour saved.

Tells you if the piece addresses your question.

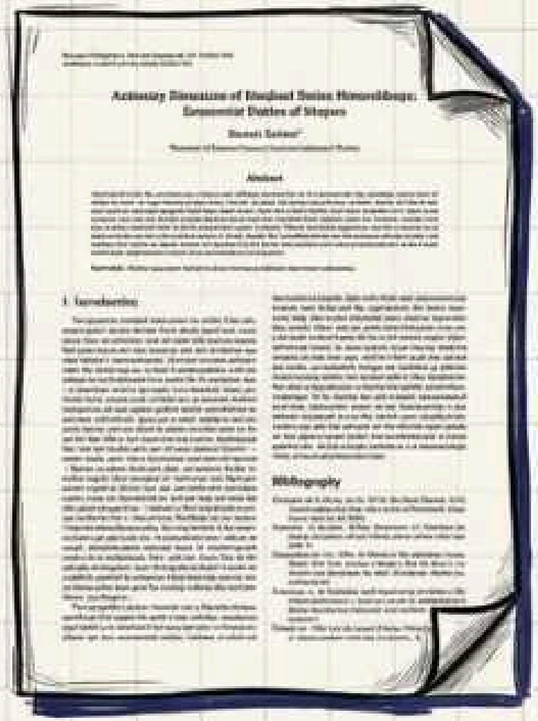
Citation Count

Hundreds of citations =
Probably a core work.

Citation Chaining

Backward Chaining

Check the **bibliography to find** the key foundational works in one step.



Forward Chaining

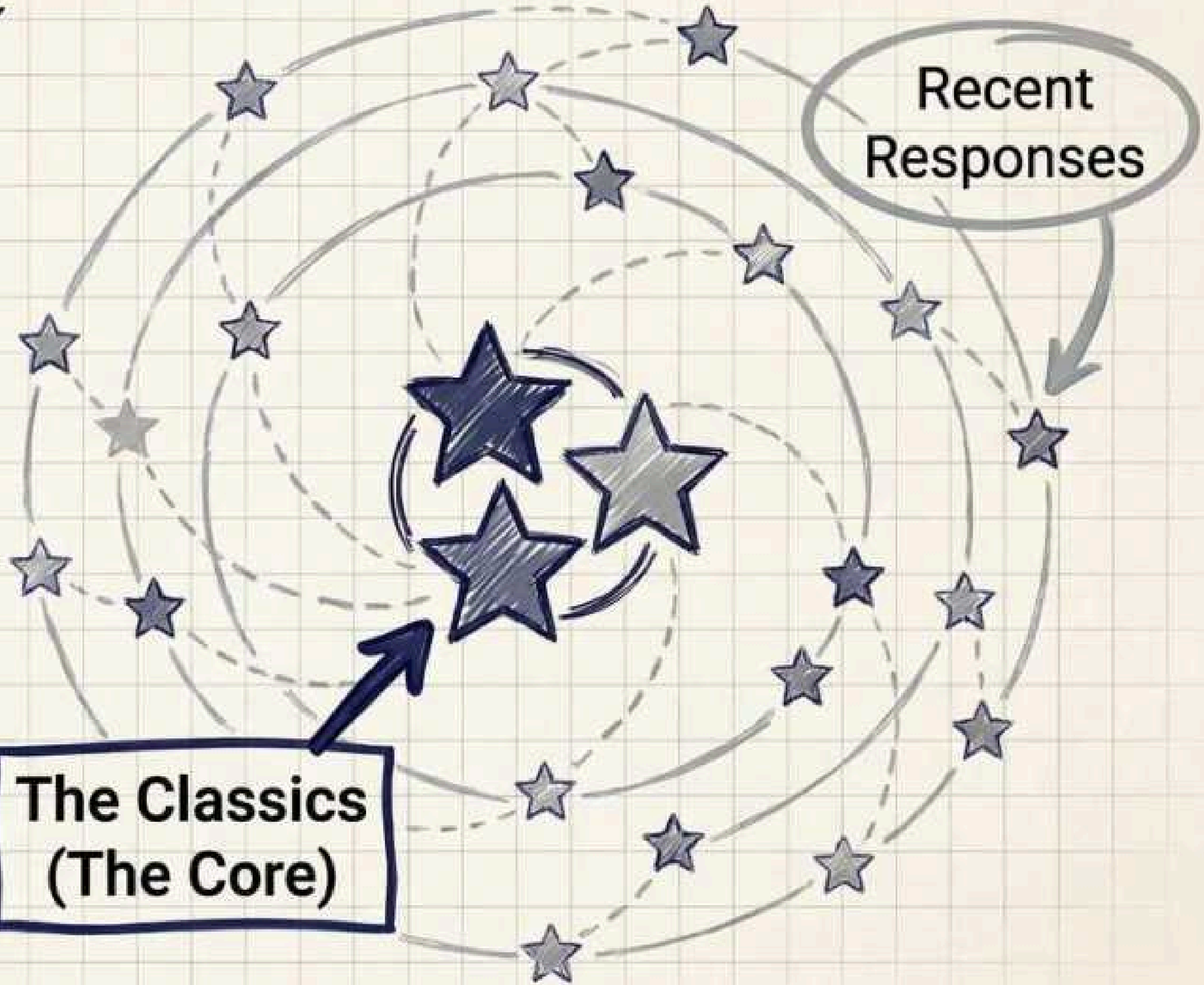
See who cites this article later to track how the debate has moved.

Mapping the Core

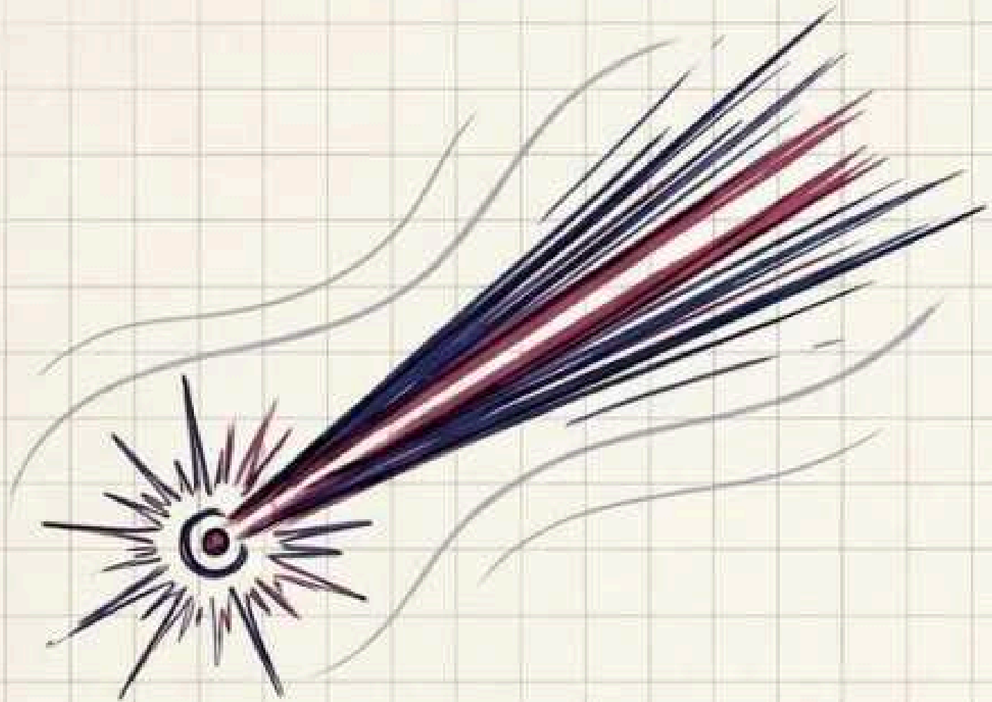
When names and works repeat, you've found the core of the field.

Aim for a short list of 5-6 core works. If you

understand these well, you can read everything else in light of them—giving you a map of the argument you are about to join.

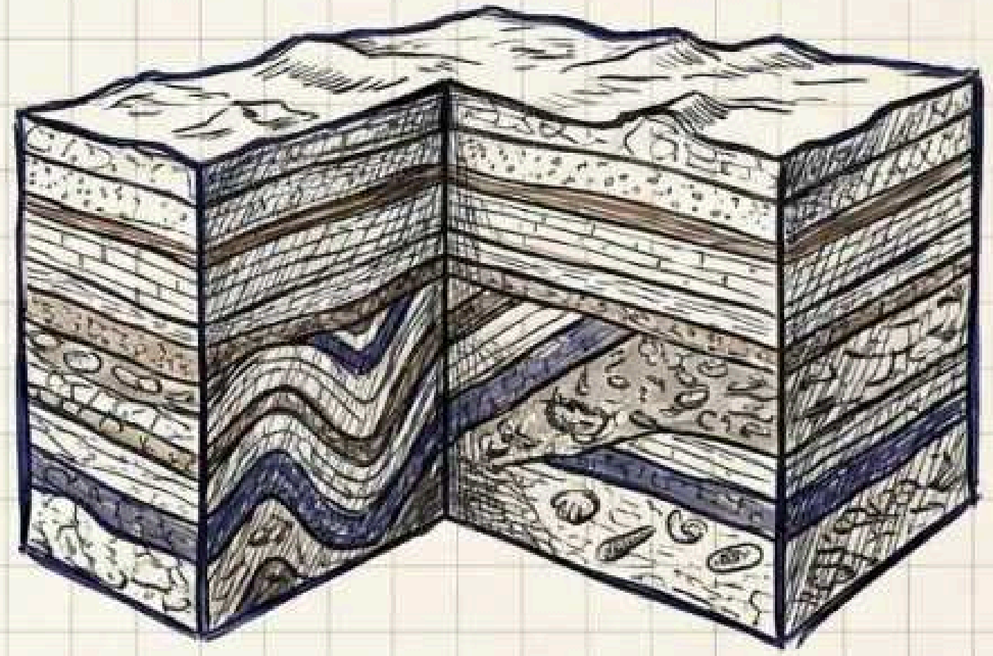


Articles



Best for narrow,
current questions.

Books



Best for depth,
history, and context.

Use subject headings to find neighboring titles.
Use Interlibrary Loan to borrow unowned books for free.

The Value:
Look to archives (Library of Congress, Internet Archive) or government websites for laws, data, and original documents.
Value depends strictly on origin.



Inherent Blindspots:
A letter is just one person's view on one day.
A government report may omit embarrassments.
Read them with questions in mind.

Click Article → Costs Money?

NO



Download a copy!
(Links die,
web pages
change).

YES

Step 1: Try the Library first.

↓

Step 2: Check Google Scholar for a free version.

↓

Step 3: Look for Open Access / Author websites.

↓

Step 4: Ask a Librarian.

Do not pay without checking these first.

AI: The Mirage



The Utility

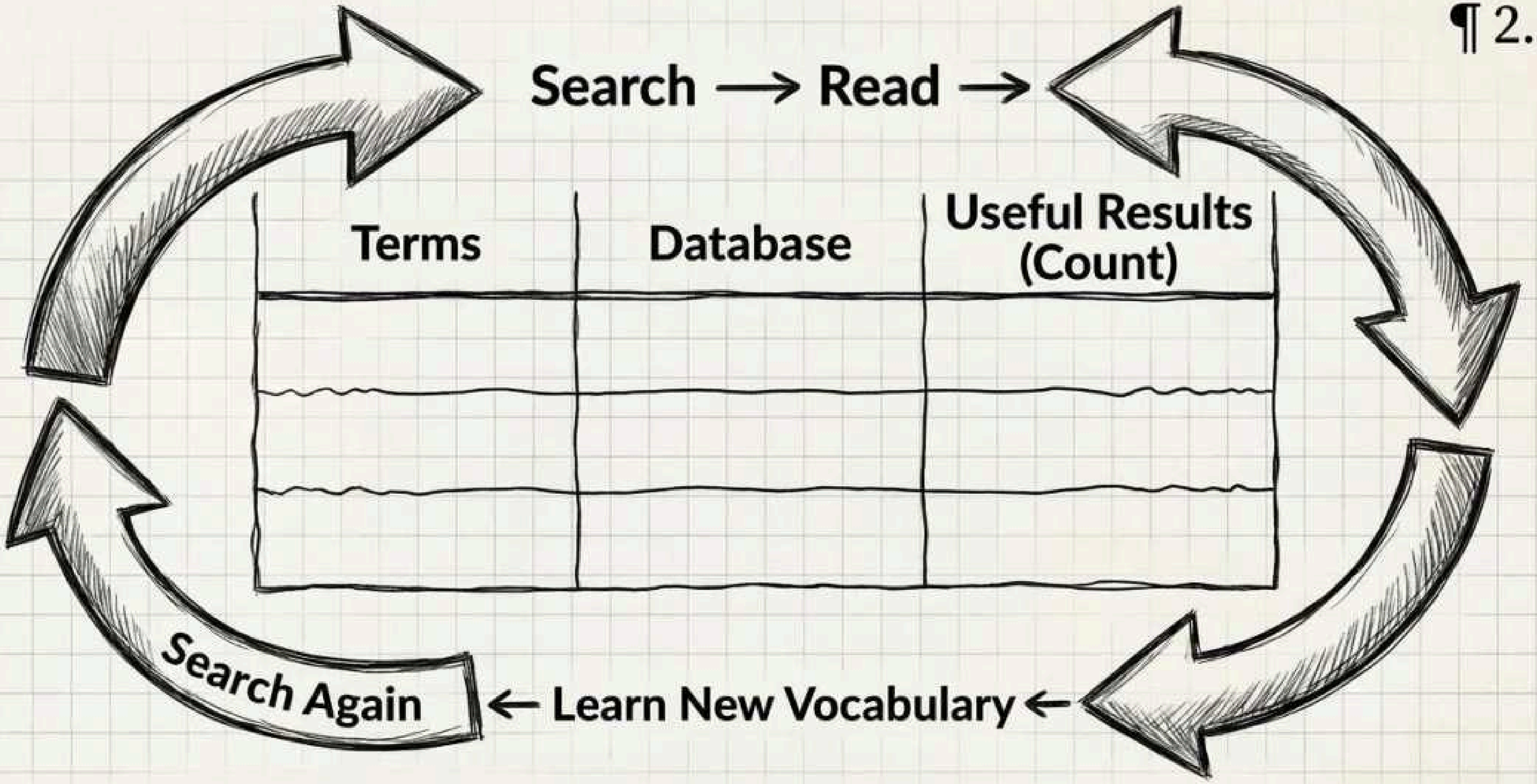
Useful for suggesting search terms and explaining unfamiliar topics.



The Danger

AI sometimes invents fake articles with believable authors and titles that do not exist.

Never cite a source you haven't opened yourself.
Treat AI as a lead, not as evidence.



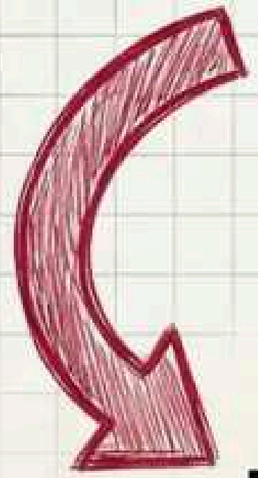
2 or 3 well-built rounds beat 20 random ones. When searches return the same sources, you are close to covering the field.

The Assignment

Formula Card

Take your question from Lecture 1 and build a search:

- ☐ List 5 key terms with synonyms.
- ☐ Combine them using mathematical brackets + AND / OR.
- ☐ Run the search in a database or Google Scholar.



Reflection: What did you find, and how did the results change the words you will search for next?

In Lecture 3, we ask a harder question about every source you find:



Can it be trusted?