1. Intro:

   a. Hello! In this video, we are going to explore the most important search functions of the Academic Search Complete database. In addition to introducing one our most powerful databases, you’ll also learn research tips that are transferable to using other databases and research tools as well.

2. Starting w/a search term:

   a. To begin your exploratory research in the Academic Search Complete database, which is an online collection of information from academic journals, newspapers, books, reviews, encyclopedias, among other sources, enter a key word or phrase. If you already know a specialized term for your topic, go ahead and plug that in. Otherwise, use everyday language to form a brief descriptive phrase, rather than typing in a question like you may be used to doing in search engines. Keep in mind that using too narrow or specific of a term in the first search field may bypass relevant information, so it’s best to start with a broad key word or phrase then narrow down as needed. So if you wanted to learn more about Spotify, Pandora, and the online music industry, you’d probably want start by searching for “music streaming.” Unless you want to learn about only one streaming service, searching only for Spotify would significantly limit your results, perhaps hiding a key source of information. Take a look at the first page of results for your search: do the series of titles, descriptions, and subject headings seem in line with your research topic? This is a great way to quickly gauge whether you’re on the right track. Either way, take note of the subjects listed for each article – this is an excellent way to find the phrases and specialized terms that experts are using to discuss this topic. Notice that this search term returned over 3000 results – far too many to read in a semester. So let’s look at some ways we can refine and enhance our research.

3. Search term AND:

   a. Since an initial search is rarely sufficient to accomplish all of your research goals, let’s take our search to the next level by productively adding more search terms. Since “music streaming” seems to be a good keyword, we’ll keep it in the top box. Underneath it, you’ll see two other search fields, both with an “AND” in front of them. When reading through my first
search results, I noticed that the topic of ‘royalties’ seems to be a major aspect of research and conversation within ‘music streaming’, so let’s see what happens when we add that term to the second search field. And look – we’ve narrowed our results to fewer than 200, simply by adding a second term. One thing to keep in mind is that when using the “AND” Boolean operator, the database will only return results that have both of the search terms, so adding too many search terms might give you the false impression that there’s no information on your topic -- when in reality, it’s being filtered out because it’s missing one of your search terms.

4. OR function:

   a. Another feature of the advanced search is the “OR” Boolean operator. Building on the search we’ve already done, let’s see how we can broaden our search results a little by using this additional operator. In the second search field, let’s add ‘OR payment’ after royalties. This is a quick way to do two searches at one time, which is particularly useful when there are multiple words that mean the same thing in a given context. The results from this search using OR will return results as if we had searched for “music streaming AND royalties” and another search for “music streaming AND payment.” In addition to saving time by only having to do one search, this method also prevents you from having to look at articles twice, since some of them use both payment and royalties as terms. Notice when we do this search, our results expand from 177 to 193. The OR operator allows us to capture additional information without having to filter through extraneous or off-topic sources. Keep in mind that using too many OR operators can cause your search to lose focus or return far too many results to be helpful as you’re trying to learn more about a topic.

5. NOT Function

   a. One last Boolean operator that can help narrow and refine our search results is “NOT.” Again, building on our previous search, let’s say we want to keep all of our previous search terms but eliminate results that discuss Taylor Swift, so we can get a better idea of how other artists are involved in this discussion. We’ll first select “NOT” from the drop-down menu next to the third search field, type in “Taylor Swift,” then click “search.” Adding in this search exception narrowed our results by around
30 articles, and now we know that the information in front of us will focus on other artists and their relation to music streaming services.

b. You can also use the NOT operator in your initial search if you know there’s something that you don’t want information on. For example, using our initial search of “music streaming,” if we know we want to bypass information that specifically relates to Spotify, we could type “music streaming NOT Spotify” in the first search box, and this would automatically remove those sources from your search.

c. As with the other operators, moderation is key. Using too many “NOTs” can easily filter out informative and key sources for your research.

6. Filters:

a. One of the key features you can use to limit your results in a productive way is to select the “peer reviewed” filter on the left side of the screen. This will ensure that all the results in front of you have undergone intensive review by other experts in this field, and it also ensures that the articles found meet the “scholarly” aspect that many of your assignments will require.

b. Another advanced feature that you may find useful is the ability to limit results by publication year. Especially in STEM and the social sciences, you may frequently find yourself needing information that has been published within the last 10-20 years, or even as recently as three years ago to the present, in order to guarantee you have the most up-to-date data available. But this filter can also be useful to find information from the past, too! If you’re researching how a disease was treated in the 1970s, you may find it helpful to limit your results only to those sources published during that decade to capture a snapshot of the conversation experts were having about those treatments while they were being developed. Just be sure that you don’t miss out on important information by using too narrow of a limit!

7. Wrap-up:

a. That’s a wrap! Now you know how to use the main search functions of the Academic Search Complete database. Of course, there are many other features to explore, so drop by the Reference Desk in the Library if you’d like some more information on how to fine-tune your searches. Good luck, and happy researching!