Research is the process of making new discoveries. Once researchers discover new knowledge, they share it by publishing it in academic journals. In order to make sure a new discovery is credible, journals verify the methods, data, and arguments through a time-intensive process known as “peer-review” in which other scholars or “referees” in the same field read and critique the study in question.

Academic articles are only the beginning of the conversation, but since these articles are generally written by experts for other experts, understanding these articles sometimes requires more specialized background in the subject than the general public may have.

This is where mass media comes in. If an academic journal publishes an article that might interest people outside of the specialized field, then news organizations and other forms of mass media will write simpler summaries of the new discovery, pointing out highlights and using a more common vocabulary. The goal of these reports is usually to explain how the results of the study might apply to the larger community.

This process is known as “accommodation,” which means that the mass media “accommodates” potential gaps in the public’s understanding of the subject.

Most of the time, these reports include a line that says something like “according to a new study” or “according to new research.” Since journalists usually use these phrases, a good tactic for searching for an accommodation is to do what’s known as a phrase search of the words “new study” or “new research.”

For example, I searched the phrase “new study” in the New York Times search bar, and found several results, including this article about Misophonia, which is an accommodation of a study about why some people get angry at certain sounds. Placing the two words within quotation marks limited my results only to articles that contained the complete phrase “new study”-- without the quotation marks, my results would include all articles that used either word, and the words might not appear together at all.

One goal for this assignment is to trace media accommodations back to their sources, which are academic research articles, and phrase searching can be a good way to find an accommodation you’d like to work with. You can search key words and phrases within a particular media outlet, like I did, or you can search through Quicksearch on the library website.

The best, which is to say the most accurate, mass media reports draw their information directly from the studies they’re reporting on, as well as from interviews with the authors of those studies, and other experts in the field. These reports will usually link directly to the study, which are often only accessible through the subscriptions of your academic library.
But let’s say you come across a mass media report that doesn’t link directly to the study it’s reporting about. If this happens, you have options. If the media report names the journal in which the study was published, you can search for the journal from the journals tab of the library website. Once you find the journal, you can search within it for the author’s name, or article keywords. If your journal search returns many results, you can narrow them by date -- simply check the date the accommodation was published, and set your search filters to reflect only results from that time frame.

If you need help finding an accommodation or its original research article, librarians are here to help -- just ask.