



# Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

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Supporting police professionals through innovative and inclusive police leadership to advance the safety and security of all Canadians.

## SME RESEARCH BRIEF

### Accessing Research from Academic Journals

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Evidence-based policing is a term kicked around by most, if not all, police agencies and is increasingly becoming an important factor in how police leaders make decisions. The concept of evidence-based practice involves bringing the best available research (i.e. evidence) to inform decision-making, implement guidelines, as well as evaluate policy and practice. However, the research for making evidence-based decisions is not always easily available to police and other practitioners. The following are tips to help you access the research you need.

#### ***Paywalls***

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So, you've heard about a study that may be relevant to your work and you'd like to read more about its findings. You search out the journal on the internet, locate the article, and click on the access button. But nothing happens. Why? Because you didn't pay the \$42.32 USD that the journal charges people to access the article. You've hit the dreaded ***paywall***.

Access to good police research is severely restricted by these paywalls. Unless you have a subscription to a journal, or have access to a library that does, it can be difficult to read studies that may be beneficial to the work you and your colleagues do. The following are tips for getting around this obstacle so that you can access more published academic research.

#### ***Tip 1: Go to Google Scholar***

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If you type Google Scholar into your Google search engine, you will be taken to the Google Scholar page. On this page, you can search through literally millions of published journal articles. While not all articles will be easily accessible, many will be associated with an easy-to-access PDF. For example, I just ran a search for articles related to "police use of force". The search generated 12,100 hits. On the first few pages of the search results, almost half of the articles could be accessed right away as a PDF. A search for "police legitimacy" produced 11,900 hits. Slightly fewer PDF versions of articles were available, but it was still possible to access many of them.

#### ***Tip 2: Email the authors***

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If you've searched for an article on Google Scholar and still can't find an easily accessible version of it, you should be able to access the authors names, their affiliations, and their email addresses. Check out the websites associated with the researchers. Many of them provide access to their articles on their websites. If you can't find the article you're interested in on these websites, email the researchers for a copy. Academic researchers are used to receiving email requests for copies of published articles. Most find it very flattering when someone wants to read about their research and are happy to share an article with an interested reader.

### Tip 3: Check out open access journals

While many journals hide their content behind paywalls, not all journals do. Some journals provide open access to their content, meaning that anyone with access to the internet can read their articles for free. And there are some open access journals that publish a lot of useful research that is relevant to the field of policing. *Criminologie* (<https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/crimino/>) is an excellent example of an open science journal that publishes criminology research in French. For policing research in English, access *Frontiers* (<https://www.frontiersin.org>) or *PLOS ONE* (<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/>). A quick search I ran of the *Frontiers* database uncovered thousands of articles about policing. In fact, when I ran the search, numerous special collections of policing articles were found that have recently been published (or will soon be published) in the journal. The special collection had titles like “Investigating the Dynamics of Police-Citizen Conflicts”, “De-Escalating Threat: The Psychophysiology of Police Decision Making”, “Police Trauma, Loss, and Resilience”, and “Police Education and Training Revisited: Drawbacks and Advances”. Each collection features numerous articles related to the collection’s theme that could be easily accessed from the internet, for free.

### Tip 4: Look for open access article repositories

Academic researchers know that their research is difficult to access. Because of this, some researchers take steps to make their research more available to readers by uploading versions of their articles to open access repositories. One of the most popular repositories is the *Open Science Framework* (OSF) (<https://osf.io>). You can search the OSF site and get easy access to all sorts of useful research. For example, a quick search of “body-worn cameras” provided me with access to 51,498 results. 2,692 of these results related to “preprints”, which are versions of manuscripts that researchers upload to the OSF that have not been peer-reviewed yet. Researchers upload these preprints because they want people to access them, read them, and even comment on them.

### Tip 5: Bring out the big guns and install Unpaywall

Finally, if you’re really serious about finding open access policing material on the internet, you can bring out the big guns and install software such as Unpaywall on your computer. Unpaywall (<https://unpaywall.org>) is a popular software that seeks out open access material on the web by scanning thousands of open access publications and repositories. It’s free and easy to set up and use.

A lot of good policing research is being conducted in Canada and abroad. Some of this research could help you do your job more effectively, help your police agency function more efficiently, or help you develop better relations with the communities you serve. But that research is sometimes difficult to access because of journal paywalls. Try some of the strategies discussed above to see if you have more luck. These tips should help you access the research you’re interested in reading. You are also invited to **download an infographic** ([https://cacp.ca/index.html?asst\\_id=2964](https://cacp.ca/index.html?asst_id=2964)) reminding you of the five tips to accessing the evidence you are looking for.

