

Research Tips

1. Build background knowledge of the Technology Area

Whether or not you have experience in the field of the Study, basic knowledge of the technology is the most important way to start a Study. Understanding the technology helps guide you towards the most useful databases, search terms and results. Encyclopedias, textbooks, journals, and general web searches provide insight around the complex terms within the patent claims and Study description.

Gather information about the history of the technology, related inventors and companies, and international versions of the technology. This opens up a wide variety of clues and search strings to help guide you to the most unique prior art. Finally, use your personal and professional experience to narrow your search.

2. Patent Claims hold the most Detailed and Useful Information

The claims within a patent are the most important source of information and describe the unique elements and inventive features that will drive your search. Unlike the abstract, which is an overview of the technology, the claims describe exactly what the technology is, and why it is unique.

The practice of “[Sentence Diagramming](#)” can be a great way to approach the long, complex claims. Sentence diagramming is the practice of splitting a sentence into the various words and phrases to understand the message being conveyed. Each claim acts as one sentence that can be split into many potential search terms. By doing so, you can start to see what makes a claim unique, and how the claims fit together.

3. Find references from before the LDPA

Patents include a wide variety of dates. The filing and issue dates identify the dates when the initial application was filed and when the patent was finally granted. Article One Studies are listed with a “Latest Date for Prior Art.” The LDPA is usually based on either the filing or issue date depending on the need for prior art. For a reference to be considered prior art, it needs to be published before the LDPA of the Study. Only references from before the LDPA will be accepted as submissions.

4. Use every piece of information available

Unlike some mystery stories, all the information we present to you in the Study description is relevant. In fact, our team painstakingly ensures that we provide you all the information you need to be successful. In addition to the Study Description, cited references and file histories can be extremely valuable search avenues. In the same way that research papers include citations, patents include cited references to show how the patent relates to other technologies. File histories list documents and correspondence between the parties involved in the application. These two areas can help you visualize the patent application process, leading to many new sources of prior art.

5. Combine Broad and Narrow Resources

A wide variety of resources can help you find the winning reference. Broad resources, like Google Scholar, can help to provide background and develop leads. While these may not lead to your final submissions, they can help you understand where you should look and which detailed search terms to use.

Narrow resources take those leads and allow you to focus your search in a specific industry or location. On the internet, there are thousands of specialized databases that provide access to the most

detailed and valuable information. Outside of internet resources, your library and personal collection can give you an even larger advantage. Libraries and other non-digitized references are less accessible, and therefore give you a better chance of winning each Study.

6. Full Text references are more valuable than Abstracts

While Abstracts can be useful, Full-Text references provide the details that can be most valuable in a prior art search. Abstracts are valuable in the middle of the search process because they provide new search terms and can show you where to focus your time. Unfortunately, when submitting your references, abstracts only tell part of the story, almost akin to reading only the introduction of a story. When you finally start gathering your top references, be sure to submit the full reference that includes all of the important details.

7. Identify the Details in “Requirements to Match”

Many Studies include a “Requirements to Match” section. “Requirements to Match” allows you to identify the exact text in your submission that provides the most value. By telling us the specific page number, table, citation, or column, we can more accurately understand why you submitted the reference. By doing this accurately, you will drastically increase your chances of earning points and rewards for your reference.

8. 1 Excellent Reference is better than 10 Good References

Each Study is like a puzzle or treasure hunt. The main goal is to find the treasure chest at the end of the journey. You will come across many different clues along the way, and may be tempted to submit those clues. In the end, it is more important to spend the time finding the treasure chest, rather than simply submitting all of the various clues.

In Study terms, this means that it is most valuable to follow all of your leads and find the most closely related reference. It is tempting to submit the first few results that have the same keywords, but it is always a better use of your time to find that one excellent reference over 10 good references.

9. Rare and Unique Prior Art is the most Valuable

The majority of the winning references in 2011 were non-patent and non-US literature. This shows that rare prior art is the most valuable because it has likely never been found before. Consider that most researchers will start with the easy, broad references and databases. By looking somewhere that nobody else uses, you can give yourself an advantage. Creativity will help you find references that nobody else in the community will find.

The most valuable prior art references include product manuals, demos, PhD theses, print journals, international literature, and translations of foreign language documents. These obscure and unique references are the most valuable, the most fun to research, and give you the best opportunity to win a Study.

10. Be Persistent!

Throughout your search, try a wide variety of databases, terms, and topics. In many cases, winning references even come from technology areas completely unrelated to the Study. If you hit a dead end, go back and try something new. Even if you think you found the best reference, continue updating your search, just in case the top reference is still out there!