ADVANCED SEARCH STRATEGIES

Introduction

We've all searched for information somewhere online.

Basic search strategies can often do the trick, but there are more advanced ways to find the best information. The following are some advanced search strategies that you can use in library databases as well other search engines:

Keywords

Okay, you've used keywords in a basic search - like this: here are your results - not enough? Too many? Not relevant to what you need? Sometimes it helps to brainstorm some keywords that are related to your topic or research question.

Too many results? Try drilling down - American Military History. How about The American Civil War.

Not enough results?

Use less specific terms. Facebook? Try social media.

If you find one really relevant article, it can be helpful to read the abstract or introduction to glean additional keywords that will guide you to more articles.

Connectors

In search engines like Google, you can search using phrases or just ask questions and get some okay results.

In a library database, it helps to take the most important keywords from a phrase or question and combine them using connectors.

Connectors can help you narrow your results or make your results more broad.

The most commonly used connectors are AND and OR
When used with more than one keyword, AND will narrow your results:

For example, if I want to find articles about how teenagers use social media, first, I pick out the key words, connect them with AND and then I pop those connected keywords into my search box. Now the database will only find articles or books that include those words. teens and social media

When you use OR as your connector, it helps you broaden your search.

Social media AND teenagers OR adolescents. Now the database will still only retrieve books and articles that include the term social media, but now they can include either teens or adolescents or both!

When you're searching in a library database, look for the advanced search option. Often it will give you easy ways to organize your search with connectors.

Quotation marks

This trick works with every database and search engine - even google.

Putting a set of quotation marks around a phrase or a full name sticks these words together in your search.

For example: an article about "cell phones".

If enter these terms without the quotes, the database could find articles about phones and cell biology but when I combine the terms with quotes, I will get results that include cell phones.

Truncation

Putting together a search is really just trying to guess what words the author used in their abstract, title or text. Sometimes you've chosen a keyword that could show up in multiple forms.

For example: genetic, genetics, genetically

Or

child, children, childhood

If you're using only one version of the word in your searches you might be missing out on other relevant sources that include a slight variation of the word. To enhance your odds of finding relevant articles - First, type the root word and then add an asterisk. Now you've truncated the word and you can find articles or books that include any of the versions of this word.

If you have any questions, please feel free to give us a call, email us or drop by the research and information desk on the library's first floor. You can also check out our other tutorials for more quick and easy help.