

Developing a Search Strategy

Worksheet

Step One: State your topic; sometimes it can help to phrase your topic as a question.
 (example: *what is the role of women in Shakespeare's tragedies?*)

My topic is: _____

Step Two: Pick 2 or 3 of the most important words or main ideas in the topic.
 (example: *women Shakespeare tragedies*)

My keywords are: _____

Step Three: Think about alternate spellings including singular and plurals, similar words or synonyms, as well as broader and narrower terms. Do any of your terms fall into a hierarchy? (Example: *MacBeth >> tragedy >> play*)

| Example: | women | Shakespeare's | tragedies |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Alternates | woman | Shakespeare | tragedy |
| Synonym | female(s) heroine girl(s) | --- | --- |
| Broader | characters | playwrights | plays drama |
| Narrower | Ophelia | --- | MacBeth |

| My keywords: | _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Alternates | | | |
| Synonym | | | |
| Broader | | | |
| Narrower | | | |

Step Four: What academic discipline might study this topic? What course is your research for? It can be useful to identify the broad discipline with which your topic might be associated. This can help you determine which encyclopedias and databases to search.

Discipline: _____

Step Five: Construct a search strategy by combining your keywords with various techniques such as Boolean operators and truncation. Boolean operators provide a method for connecting the keywords together in a way that databases and search engines can understand. NOTE: it is not necessary to use all of the keywords and alternate terms from the first page. Only use them in Step Six if your initial strategy doesn't give you useful results.

AND narrows a search by requiring that both terms be in the results
eg. *Shakespeare and tragedies*

OR broadens a search by looking for either of the words
eg. *Women or females*

NOT narrows a search by eliminating a certain aspect of a topic
eg. *Shakespeare not comedies* - use very carefully

***** truncates the term and searches for any ending
eg. *Traged** - picks up tragedy as well as tragedies

() you can combine all of the operators for a more precise search
eg. *Shakespeare and (women or females) and traged**

My search strategy:

Step Six : Reassess your search strategy based on your results. If you did not get enough results or if you got too many, consider using some of the problem solving strategies such as broadening your topic focus or limiting your search to particular fields