Identify your Main Terms

There are several things to consider when running a search in a database. Knowing that databases work best using terms or phrases, not written out descriptions or sentences asking about what you are seeking. Follow these tips.

- First, define your research question.
  
  Try stating your topic in the form of a question. Many HS fields of study use what is called a PICO (Patient population, Intervention, Comparison and Outcome) question.

- Second, identify the main concepts or topics in your research question.
  
  Pick two to three terms focusing on the components of a PICO question (Patient population, Intervention, Comparison and Outcome).

  In most cases, the patient population can be identified with limiters or facets chosen during a search or once a search is run in a database.

  The Outcome is typically revealed in the articles you find through your search.

Build your Search

- Join your terms together using Boolean operators: AND, OR, and NOT.
  
  You may notice these are options between search boxes in the advanced search of any database.

  AND = returns only those hits that contain both the terms joined by AND, narrowing your results.

  OR = returns those hits that contain one of the terms as well as those that contain both terms, broadening your results.

  NOT = eliminates unwanted topics or aspects of your research.

  -Useful after you have run a search and have reviewed the hits you retrieved. Specifics are noticed in the results that are not desired and then you rerun the search adding terms with NOT, reducing identified irrelevant results.

- Search for exact phrases by enclosing them in “ “.
- Use () to create a more precise search. Example: diabetes (type I OR type II)
- Use Truncation: The symbol * or ? is used as a right-handed truncation, will find all forms of a word. Ex: security* will retrieve security, securities, and securitization or Ex: prevent? : retrieves prevent, prevention, preventing, prevented
Searching Tips Notes

- **Use Wildcards**: Use the symbol # (one character) or ? (one of more characters) is used to replace any single character, inside the word. Ex: wom#n: retrieves women and woman

**Use Filters/Limiters/Facets**

Limiters or facets are options you select when building your search that help set the parameters for the results that will be included in your hit list.

Examples:

- date (articles published within the past five years)
- scholarly
- peer reviewed
- female

These options are most likely identified in an **Advanced Search** and in the left hand column of your results list from most databases. Therefore, with the advanced search you can select them before you run the search or after you have viewed the results.

**Select and Get to Know your Database**

Many databases default to a basic search with one search box and may or may not provide limiters or facets to specify what you want in your results.

**Once you select your database:**

- Use the Advanced search in a database to learn about all of your options in individual tools.

  This provides a specific approach to searching for a known author, title, or subject, or searching specific parts of records for terms.
  Ex: Alfred Smith, set the drop down to search only the Author field in each record.

- Look for the **Help or About links** in the database that provide more information on how you can maximize your search results and what search strategies work in each tool.
- Do **not** set a limit of full-text only in searches.

  Our library has a link resolver that will provide a link to articles that are full text in other tools we make available, follow all possible links suggesting full text access.

- Can’t find the full text to read the article?
  Have you tried all possible links and none provide the article? Create an interlibrary loan request. Follow the link **Request from Interlibrary Loan** under your desired article. This is free and provides fast delivery to your individual account in the system.
Viewing your Results

- Take note of the “Held by” statement, links or files under each item on your hit list to identify those items to which we own access and download the article.
- Many tools have an option to select those results you wish to use, then email them to yourself and/or cite them in the citation style of your choice.
- If you have retrieved too many results or hits are not as relevant as you would like. Revise your search by ...
  - Changing the terms used
  - Look for terms used to describe the topics in a relevant article. For Example: Identify a source that most accurately covers your research, then look under the subject section of the record for that article to find other terms you can use to conduct more effective searches, retrieving highly relevant results.
- removing or adding other limits or facets
  - You may find subject area options to pull out a specific aspect of your topic. Ex: “Economic” subject area of a search results list from a search on the "potato famine".