



BUILDING A SEARCH STRATEGY

In today's electronic world, most journal or magazine articles can be found on line through subscription databases. Briggs Library has print subscriptions to many journals, but those numbers are decreasing as more and more full text articles are made available electronically. Therefore, it is crucial that you know how to find articles using electronic databases. Thinking about your research topic and developing a search strategy before you sit down in front of the computer should save you time (and cause less frustration).

Generating search terms

Stringing keywords together may be the best way to search for information in a search engine like Google, but you may want to refine your search to limit the results. To get the best search results you need to determine what you are looking for and what terms should be searched.

1. Get started by choosing a broad topic
2. Gather background information
 - encyclopedias
 - dictionaries
 - class textbooks/readings
 - don't forget to look at the citations and bibliographies listed; these can start you in the right direction
3. What specifically are you interested in? Can you limit it by
 - time
 - place
 - person
 - other aspects of the topic
4. Write down a research statement you would like to explore.
5. Locate the key terms from that statement and create a list of terms you would like to search as well as appropriate synonyms or related terms.
6. Using the terms and limiters you have developed, generate a search (or searches).

Example

1. Information literacy
2. Gather background information
3. place: college
other: academic success
4. How do information literacy requirements contribute to academic success in college?
5. Key terms: "information literacy," success, college

Synonyms

“information literacy”“digital literacy,” “media literacy,” “computer literacy”

success.....achievement, accomplishment

collegeuniversity, higher education, post-secondary

6. See below for searches created using Boolean searches

Boolean searching

Now that you’ve found some terms to search for, how should you link them together?

quotation marks	Searches for words between the quote marks exactly as they appear “media literacy” “information literacy”
OR	Searches for all of the search terms listed; the more terms listed the more results you get information OR literacy OR media
AND	Searches for articles where the all of the terms appear; more inclusive with fewer results; primarily do not have to include in search string information media literacy
NOT (-)	Removes certain terms from the search; allows you to limit results you might not want “information literacy” success -school -public
nesting*	Group similar terms together for better search results (information OR media) literacy “academic achievement” (college OR university)

You are now ready to find a database to search. If you are unsure which database to use, check Research Quickstart or talk with a reference librarian.

* Nesting will not work in all databases. If you are not getting the results you want, check the Help link for information on Boolean searching or talk with the reference librarian on duty.

Other search terms

Some databases also allow you to limit your search terms by something other than keyword, most commonly title, author or subject. There may be drop down menus or you may just key in an abbreviation for the field you would like to search.

Example

TI: Faculty-Librarian Collaboration to Achieve Integration of Information

Literacy

AU: Joyce Lindstrom

SU: information literacy

Take care when searching for subject because subject and keyword are different. Subjects are generated from a controlled vocabulary while keyword might be provided by the author or the publisher. When searching, don't be afraid to try the same search term in each field.