

Basic Searching: Part 1

This video will show you how to think about your topic effectively before you begin your research.

First, you'll want to get a basic understanding of your topic by looking at encyclopedias and dictionaries. This will also help you think of key words and concepts to use when searching.

Let's say you want to know how class size affects undergraduate students' grades. The first thing you need to do is select your key words. In this case, you'll likely choose class size, undergraduate students and grades.

The next step is to brainstorm other terms that relate to the topic you've chosen so that you have a list of words to work with if the database doesn't return many results with your initial keywords.

You may need to spend some time broadening or narrowing your topic with keywords in order to get a good number of results.

The terms could be broader, like students; related, like pupils; or narrower; like first year students.

Now you'll need to figure out how to search these words in the database.

Put quotation marks around terms you want to appear together, such as class size.

Use an asterisk after the root of a word to find multiple endings. If I type grad*, the database will search for grading, grades, and grade.

This technique is called truncation, and can also be used within a word to find variant spellings.

Effective research usually requires you to try more than one search, so don't be afraid to use different combinations of keywords or databases.

Watch the next video in this series for information on how to input your search into a database.

And if you have other questions about searching, or about this video, ask a librarian. We're happy to help!