Creating Search Statements

**Take the following steps to select the best keywords for your online research.**

After selecting a topic (in consultation with your supervisor) and establishing a research question

1. Choose 3-4 pertinent words from your topic and research question to use for your search.
2. Refine your search by using synonyms for the words chosen in Step 1.
3. Refine your search by using suggestions made by your search results.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Research Question** | **Keywords I** | **Keywords II** | **Keywords III** |
| **i.e. History of Birth Control in the United States** | **Did early twentieth century efforts to increase access to birth control have a negative impact on women of colour?** | **20th century**  **Birth control**  **Women of colour** | **Birth control**  **History**  **Black women**  **Latino women** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Fix: If you are at a loss for words, try to find words that widen, narrow, or connect with your topic or keywords.**

**Keyword or Topic: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Keyword/Topic** | **Wider** | **Narrower** | **Connected** |
|  |  |  |  |

**Search Terms to Avoid**

Some words entered into your search statement may prevent you from retrieving effective search results. The following types of terms are best avoided when selecting your search terms.

**Stopwords** are words that have a high frequency of use in the English language. Called stopwords because they can slow down or invalidate a search. Many databases and search engines are programmed to ignore these words. Examples:

* articles (a, an, the)
* prepositions (of, on, in, with)
* conjunctions (but, however)

**Common words** are often terms so heavily used in a given database that they will retrieve too many records to be useful. For example, using the search term "education" in the *Education Full Text* database would retrieve almost every record in that database.

**Abstract words or concepts**can be difficult to describe search terms, such as "causes of" or "impact on." These are a reflection, analysis, and evaluation of your research rather than a concrete, descriptive term. Use of these typically generates invalid search results. Some of the abstract terms to avoid include:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * impact * influence * importance * effect | * development * significance * comparison | * contrast * cause * characteristics |

"Search Strategies: Creating Search Statements - Search Term Selection." *Search Strategies: Creating Search*

*Statements - Search Term Selection*. Perdue Universtiy, 3 Sept. 2010. Web. 17 Apr. 2013.