



Martha S. Grafton Library

Alie Peppers
(540) 887-7316
apeppers@mbc.edu

Ilka Datig
(540) 887.7299
idatig@mbc.edu

ask@mbc.edu
www.mbc.edu/graft

Search Strategy Worksheet

Search Topic (Identify your research topic in a sentence or two):¹

Search Words (Select the words that represent your main ideas):

Additional Search Words (Think of related or similar words):

Select a Database (Use the *Databases and Article Searching* link off the homepage): _____

Start Your Search (Begin with just one word or phrase):

- Too many hits? Narrow your search by...
 - Adding a word from above
 - Search for full-text²
 - Limit by publication type (ex., scholarly articles)
 - Limit by date

- Too Few Hits? Broaden your search by...
 - Substituting words from above
 - Truncate with the asterisk symbol (*)³
 - Take out a word from your search
 - If searching for two words, try `OR`⁴
 - Use Subject Terms from relevant articles⁵
 - Try a different database

Identify Successes (What search words, queries, phrases, and subject terms worked well?):

¹ Struggling to define your research topic? Try getting more background information. Follow the *Book and Reference Sources* link on the library homepage. Visit some of our online reference sources, such as the [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#) or [Oxford Reference Online](#).

² Most databases have a full-text only option. Just find the box that says 'Full-text' and click it.

³ Truncation allows you to search for word roots, in cases when you are interested in all variations of the root. For example, say you are interested in all aspects of adoption. If you only search for the word

adoption

you will miss some articles of interest. Instead, search for:

adopt*

and you will get articles with the words

adoption, adopting, adopted, etc...

⁴ OR is an example of what are called Boolean Operators. By using OR in conjunction with your search terms, you are telling the database that either one of these words is relevant to you. It is often useful for searching synonyms, such as

Third-world OR developing

Teenage OR adolescent OR young adult

A good rule of thumb: *You get more if you use OR.*

⁵ If you find an article that is extremely helpful and relevant to your topic, you can use the subject terms of that article to search for more like it. To see the subject terms, click on the article and look for Subject Terms. Write those words down and do a subject search for them. Often, you can click directly on the words themselves to do a quick search.