Effective Search Strategies

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1. Google v. Research Databases
Search engines look throughout the internet for information which can be freely viewed by anyone with a connection.

They also include content that can change or disappear entirely.

Information is not always evaluated for accuracy and/or reliability.

There are no standards in place; ANYONE can publish their opinions or ideas on the internet.

Information is written and submitted by experts in their respective fields (citations available for all information)

Information is evaluated for accuracy and reliability by teams of subject experts and publishers (Peer reviewed and scholarly journals noted in databases)

Must be accessed through the library website with your username and password, meaning that only authenticated users (students, faculty) can use the databases.
Searching Tools

• Abstract and citation databases
  – Social Work Abstracts, Web of Science, Sociological Abstracts, Scopus

• Full-text databases
  – PsycINFO, JSTOR, ERIC

• Library search system
  – libraries.usc.edu

• Google/Google Scholar
  – Scholarly sources, grey literature
Get more out of Google

- Searching within a particular domain (ex. "gov" or "edu") can help you find relevant materials for research.
- Limiting your dates to very current or a historical time range can help you target your search.
Research Databases: PsycINFO

"community based violence" AND children
Research Databases: Social Work Abstracts

Searching: Social Work Abstracts | Choose Databases

"community based violence" AND children

Search Options | Basic Search | Advanced Search | Search History
Google Scholar

"community based violence" AND children

Articles

Case law

Stand on the shoulders of giants

http://scholar.google.com
2. Reduce your topic to a few keywords

Research paper on the effects of community based violence on children and families.

community based violence, children, families
Natural Language versus Keyword Searching

Searching in full sentences and phrases - For example how we ask someone a question to gather information.

What are the social services available to victims of domestic violence in this community?

Searching with individual words that are often the main ideas of the natural, everyday question.

Allows for larger number of results because the database searches the full text for terms.
Brainstorm broad and narrow terms

Are children who play video games more violent?

- children
- play
- video games
- violent
- adolescent
- recreate
- computer games
- vicious
- juvenile
- engage
- electronic games
- disturbed
- youth
- interact
- cruel
- minor
- manic
- teenager
- reckless

From University of Washington (https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/910043/pages/generating-keywords-for-successful-searching)
What social services are available to victims of domestic violence?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>social services</th>
<th>victims</th>
<th>domestic violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>programs</td>
<td>depression</td>
<td>intimate partner violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resources</td>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>survivors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Using Boolean Search Strategies

AND, OR, and NOT
AND

Use AND to tell the database that your search results must include both or all of your keywords.

Helps to narrow results by combining keywords.

Helpful when searching a broad topic to retrieve less results.

Crime

Poverty
Use OR to connect two or more similar concepts.

Helps to broaden your search and retrieve more results.

Not all results will contain both concepts.
Use NOT to exclude concepts from your search.

Narrows your search

It tells the database to ignore results with one concept - even if those results contain other concepts used the search.

crime NOT poverty
Does the order of operators matter?

Yes...

Databases are programmed to prioritize Boolean Operators and this influences how your search is performed.

For instance, most databases give AND and NOT precedence over OR, meaning terms linked with AND will be searched before those linked with OR, no matter the order they appear in your search.

In any database, using parentheses will override the search precedence.
Parentheses

You can use parentheses to build a search with a combination of Boolean Operators.

Example:

(children OR youth) AND violence

children OR (youth AND violence)

children OR youth AND violence
4. Advanced Searching
Phrase Searching

To search for a phrase, use “double quotes” to retrieve results that include that exact phrase.

When you are using phrases and keywords together use AND to join the terms and help focus your search.

Example: “cognitive behavioral therapy”
Truncation or Wild Card

Many databases offer options to search using only part of the word, called Truncation.

Asterisk (*): Used to replace one or more characters, generally at the end of the word; Some databases permit the asterisk in the middle of a word

○ Example: cardio* retrieves: cardio, cardioendoscopes, cardiomyopathy, cardiovascular, etc.
○ Example: o*er retrieves: over, offer, October, etc.

Note: Wildcard options generally may not be used inside a phrase search (e.g. "child* therapy" is not an acceptable search, but child* AND therapy is).
Subject Searching

In some databases subject headings/topics (or other terms) have been manually applied to each individual citation.

In addition to using keywords, it's important to look for subject headings related to your search terms. Adding them to your search will increase your retrieval of appropriate materials.

1. Find the subject headings that match your terms by using the Thesaurus or Subject look up options
2. Combine similar keywords and subject headings with OR
3. Combine different subjects with AND
Filters

These options will allow you to specify more details about the results you’re looking for such as methodology, document type, or age group.

If your assignment asked you to find an **empirical study** of the effects of **poverty** on **community crime**, your search could look like the following:
Alyssa Brissett
Social Work Librarian

MRF 104A
abrisset@usc.edu
213-821-0494