

Search Strategy Guide

Before you begin searching in an on-line database it is a good idea to plan your search strategy ahead of time. This advance preparation will allow better utilization of your time to search the database and obtain results.

STEP 1

Describe your research topic. Be as specific as possible.

STEP 2

Choose the appropriate database for your topic.

STEP 3

Divide your topic into major concepts. (Hint: ignore articles and prepositions and words like “cause” or “effect”. For example the topic “The effect of smoking on the health of adolescents” divides into the concepts “smoking”, “health” and “adolescents”.) List possible synonyms or related terms for each concept.

Concept A

Concept B

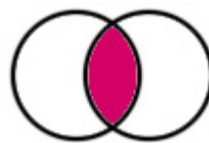
Concept C

STEP 4

Connect your concepts using these Boolean Logic operators:

AND limits a set to only those records with both concepts.

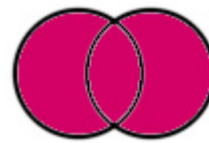
Smoking



Adolescents

OR broadens a set to include records where either term can be found. **OR** is used to bring like terms or synonyms together

Adolescents



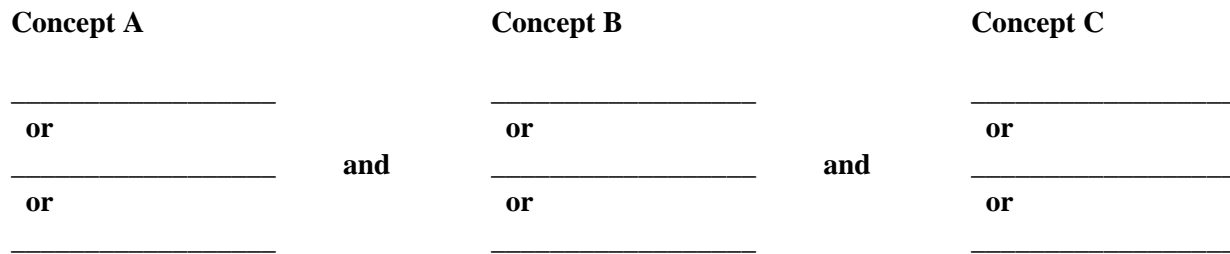
Teenagers

NOT narrows a set to exclude records containing a concept. (Be careful with **NOT**, you may lose valuable information.)

Adolescents



Adults



STEP 5

Search the database. Note that different databases have different search techniques. Use the database help screens to determine the correct method of entering terms and combining topics. You may have to revise your search strategy somewhat at this point, depending on the results of your search.

If you retrieve too many records, narrow your search:

- Add another concept using the **and** operator.
- Use fewer synonyms.
- Limit your search to subject headings instead of open text searching

If you retrieve too few records broaden your search:

- Add more synonyms to concepts using the **or** operator.
- Use fewer concepts. For example, try combining two concepts instead of three when using the **and** operator.

If you retrieve too many irrelevant records, use different search terms:

- If any of the records you have looked at are on topic, try using the subject headings/terms you find in those records.

STEP 6

Print or **e-mail** or **save** the results of your search. To save time, paper and money print only the records you need. If you are searching in a full text database such as *Research Library* or *Academic Search Premier* you may be able to print the full article at this step.

STEP 7

Obtain the text of the records you selected by clicking on the **Search for Article** link or checking the **Full Text Journal** list for periodicals available at Centennial if you searched in a bibliographic database such as *CINAHL* or *Medline*.

AT ANY STEP

Need help? Ask a Library Staff member

For more information go to the Library website:

library.centennialcollege.ca → **Research** → **Find Articles & Journals** → **How to Find Articles: Search Assistance Guide**