Searching effectively for information

Introduction

When you have decided upon the search terms / keywords to use and where you are going to look for them (eg. Using the *Library catalogue*, *Discover*). The next step is to decide **HOW** you are going to look for them.

Let's take the following assignment title as an example:

Consider the impact of childhood cyberbullying upon adulthood

As discussed elsewhere in Study Hub Online, you need to avoid typing the title exactly as it appears. A few keywords that we could use are as follows:

Child	Childhood	Children	Adolescent	Adolescents	Adolescence	Teen
Teenaged	Teenager	Teenagers	Cyberbully	Cyberbullies	Cyberbullying	School
Schooling	Adult	Adulthood	Adults	Troll	Trolling	Trolls

See other areas within *Finding and Using Information* on *Study hub Online* for examples of using *Credo reference*, Thesauri etc for inspiration if you are having trouble thinking of keywords to use.

Using Truncation and wildcards

Truncation

Using the above example, you can retrieve multiple references / search results containing the terms *child*, *childhood* and *children* simultaneously by using a symbol, often an asterisk (*) as follows:

For example:

Child* - searches for every possible word which can be formed with the letters c-h-i-l-d and subsequent letters.

Thus **Child*** will retrieve information sources containing the terms:

Child

Childhood

Children

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Similarly, **Adolescen*** would retrieve information sources containing:

Adolescence

Adolescent

Adolescents

Wild cards

You may want to focus on the **behaviour** of children who are being bullied. The word behaviour is often spelt as **behavior** in American texts and research papers. Similarly, the words **colour** and organise are sometimes written as **color** and **organize** in research produced elsewhere around the world.

You can use a wild card symbol (often a **?**) to retrieve references to both spellings simultaneously:

Behavio?r   retrieves Behaviour or Behavior

Colo?r   retrieves Colour or Color

If you are searching for information on a particular phrase such as **looked after children** or **Mode of Action, you can often include the phrases in quotation marks (" ").** This will ensure that results retrieved contain the words in the exact order:

"Mode of Action"

"Looked after children"

Combining your search terms:

Broad searches – Combine search terms with OR

When doing research on children, we could use the terms **teenage** and **adolescent**, as well as the term **child** simultaneously to look for as much relevant information as possible:

N.B. It is important to use capital letters for **OR** so it becomes a command and not a search term within your search enquiry.

eg:

Child* OR Teen* OR Adolescen* - Is a very broad search. It will retrieve:

- Every reference containing the term child, children, childhood etc

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- Every reference containing the term teen, teens, teenager, teenaged etc
- Every reference containing the terms adolescence, adolescent, adolescents etc

This approach is thus an ideal way of starting your search for information as you will have a lot of references to sort through and narrow down by other means.

Narrow / More specific searches:

Combining your searches with the word AND:

If you are searching for a more specific topic combine your search terms with the word **AND**

eg:

Child* AND Cyberbull* - Is a very specific search in that it would only retrieve:

- Every reference containing BOTH of the terms Child* and the term cyberbull*

  (You would not retrieve any references which were just about children or any which were just about cyberbullies / cyberbullying.)

As with the use of **AND** it is important to use capital letters for so it becomes a command and not a search term within your search enquiry.

Combining your searches with the word NOT:

It is very useful to be able to eliminate unwanted references from a search. You can do this by combining your search terms with **NOT**:

eg:

Child NOT (Infant OR Junior) would:

eliminate any references about infants or junior school children.

When you are combining a number of search terms or searches it is good practice to group them together within brackets. For example:

(National Health Service OR NHS) AND (Nurs* AND Infect* AND Control*)

Narrowing down your searches

You may find that you retrieve a lot of results from your initial search. For instance, sometimes a search on *Discover* can retrieve many thousands of hits. If this happens, consider narrowing your search down in the following ways:

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Language
Most search resources will allow you to filter out any items not written in English (or other languages). This should be your first approach, since there is little point in leaving references in which you can't understand.

Relevance
Most resources will allow you to arrange your results according to their relevance to your search terms. On many research tools (eg. *Discover*) you can specify that you want your search terms to appear within the title of your hits, rather than in an abstract or elsewhere, which often means that your topic will only be mentioned briefly in the source in question.

Publication date
Many websites and online resources will allow you to limit your search results to items published within a specific date range. Sometimes your tutor may state that you should only consult information sources published within the last ten or twenty years, for example.

Geography
If you are looking for research which has been done in or about a particular country, such as the United Kingdom, an online resource will very often allow you to limit your results in this way.

Peer reviewed items
If you retrieve a lot of results in your search it is important to apply a limit to peer reviewed items. This especially applies to resources such as *Discover,* whereby the information sources have been tailored to a variety of end user needs. Thus some journal articles retrieved may be college level rather than suitable for a University level assignment, if a peer-reviewed limit is not applied.

Full Text
When you carry out a search on *Discover* your search will always default to returning full text electronic information sources on your topic, unless you choose to remove this limit.

Too few results?
If your search has returned a low number or no results, try removing some of the limits mentioned above, if applicable. Secondly, try removing some of the keywords: Do you really need to find items centred around the United Kingdom, for example? You might also consider entering the terms you have used in a thesaurus, to see if there are any related terms or synonyms which you could use. Finally, if a journal article looks reasonably relevant, but is not exactly what you were after, have a look at the abstract to see if you can identify any keywords from there, or look at the subject keywords that the author or the database has provided. It might also be worth looking in the reference list of a journal article to see if any of the cited sources cover your topic in more detail than the item which you have consulted.

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Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:

lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub