Database Searching: Developing an Effective Search Strategy for Your Topic

1. Write a clearly stated topic sentence in the form of a question (see example below in #5):

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

2. Select 2-3 concept keywords from your topic sentence:

Concept Keyword A: ________________________________
Concept Keyword B: ________________________________
Concept Keyword C: ________________________________

3. Based on the concept keywords above, think of several synonyms, related, or alternate terms:

Concept Keyword A: Synonyms
_________________________________________________________________________________

Concept Keyword B: Synonyms
_________________________________________________________________________________

Concept Keyword C: Synonyms
_________________________________________________________________________________

4. Formulate a search strategy using Boolean “operators” (AND / OR) to connect keywords and synonyms. Combine synonyms with OR. Combine different keywords with AND.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept Keywords A and Synonyms A</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>OR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept Keywords B and Synonyms B</td>
<td>AND</td>
<td>AND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Keywords C and Synonyms A</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Take your search strategies from above and insert them into the database search fields

1st Field: Concept Keyword A or Synonym A1 or Synonym A2
AND 2nd Field: Concept Keyword B or Synonym B1 or Synonym B2
AND 3rd Field: Concept Keyword C or Synonym C1 or Synonym C2

For example: If your topic is: What is the relationship between teen suicide and drinking?

              teenagers or youth
AND         drinking or alcohol
AND         suicide

Use parentheses to enclose search terms and their operators within one field to specify the order in which they are interpreted. Information within parentheses is read first, the information outside parentheses is read next. For example, (teens or teenagers) and suicide

6. Review results and revise search. If there are not enough results, remove one or more of your keywords to broaden your search. If there are too many results, use the limiters on the left side of the results page to narrow your search.

7. From the results list, pick an article that seems the most relevant to your topic. Click on the title of the article to get to the article details.
What Subject Terms are listed there?

__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________

Are they the same as your search terms? If not, consider doing another search using some of the subject terms that are most relevant to your topic. Be sure to change the “Select a Field” option to SU Subject Terms.