

Keywords + Searching

When searching for sources, the words that you type in are called Keywords.

Keywords are very important and can make the difference between finding what you need and getting stuck.

The computer uses language differently than we do, so you need to think differently when working with keywords.

For example: If you were doing a paper on what kids should eat, you might want to use the words “kids” and “eat” to search. However, these are not the best keywords. Instead, try using the words “children” and “nutrition.” The difference is simply that information is cataloged by “official” keywords, so more formal vocabulary will get you better results. Meaning, “kids” is really the informal word for “children,” making children the better search term. Although “eat” and “nutrition” do not mean the same exact thing, by searching for “nutrition” you will get sources that discuss what children need to eat in order to have good nutrition.

If you are not finding many results in your database searches, try changing your keywords. You can also look up the “Creating an Effective Search Strategy” video posted by Purdue University on YouTube for more tips.

Remember to also utilize multiple search boxes, when available. You will get different search results if you type all of your words into one search box, than if you type one keyword into each search box (connected by AND).

You can also use the multiple search boxes to get rid of specific results.

For example: If you were working with keywords “children” and “nutrition,” but keep getting sources that only talk about babies, you may want to enter “infant” into one of the search boxes, and change the connector from AND to NOT. This will then give you all the sources that mention both “children” and “nutrition,” but leave out the ones that mention “infant” specifically.

Keywords will help you find the best, or most relevant, sources, but often you will need to refine your results even further. The best way to do this is by using the Advanced Search feature in the database.

Advanced search allows you to set additional parameters on your search so that you only get results that are relevant to what you are looking for.

Some of the advanced search options you may want to use:

- *Full Text:* by selecting the full text option, you will limit your search to sources that you actually have access to (the management of sources online is very complicated, and there are many sources that require you to pay before reading them; by selecting full text you will only be looking at sources that the library has already paid for you to have access to)

- *Date:* by setting a date range (only use years, not months and days), you will limit your search to sources that have been published within that time frame; this will eliminate results that are not relevant to what you are researching

Pro-Tip: If you don’t use any parameters and have very broad keywords, you will get an overwhelming number of results and probably have difficulty deciding which sources to use. On the other hand, if you set too many parameters, you will filter out materials that may be useful in your research, so be selective and go slowly. You might have to play around with the search features in order to find a good balance.