General Tips for Identifying Search Terms

Database providers continuously strive to streamline the research process, so it’s worth your time to check the databases’ Help links to see if any changes have been made to the search functions. Before you even begin searching a database, consider these steps for creating a list of relevant words and terms:

- What do you want to know? Try to state your information need in a sentence, question, or phrase:

  What impact does advertising have on children’s diets?

- Identify the key terms in your initial question or sentence:

  advertising
  children’s
  impact
  diets

- Think of other words that could describe your topic. This is where reading general information from encyclopedias, for example, would be helpful. Search the Library catalog for your topic and encyclopedias (i.e. ethics AND encyclopedias). You could also consult a thesaurus.

  advertising
  childrens
  impact
  diets
  marketing
  adolescents
  effect
  food choices
  promotion
  youth
  influence
  eating habits

Use Boolean operators* (AND, OR) to combine synonymous terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Logical Operator</th>
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<tr>
<td>advertising</td>
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*What is a Boolean operator? The most common Boolean operators are AND & OR. The use of operators allows researchers to combine several search terms into one search. Identify several words and terms that can be used in different combinations to get to relevant results. Keep in mind, it is not necessary or even advisable to enter all of the terms you brainstorm into one search. In the above example: each column of terms could be a separate search.