

Improving your search results

You have run your information search and looked at your results with a critical eye only to find they're not quite working for you – what can you do now? Whether you are overwhelmed with options or struggling to find any results at all, there are simple search techniques you can apply to modify and improve your search to ensure you get the best results for your studies.

Keywords: the search terms that you use in your search are the key to getting the best results, so it is important you get these right. Are there alternative keywords or synonyms that you can use? Try to make a balanced list of targeted keywords.

Can't find enough?

Search a broad, less specialised resource, e.g. Scopus.

Truncate your search terms using an asterisk to find multiple word endings, e.g. toast* = toast, toasted.

Combine synonyms/related keywords with **OR**.

Use a broader search term or try [controlled vocabulary](#).

Use a question mark to search for alternative spellings of keywords, e.g. colo?r will find colour, color etc.

Conduct a [360 degree search](#) around key journal articles you have found.

Found too much?

Search a more [subject specialised](#) resource.

Apply limits and filters (e.g. date, genre, subject etc.).

Use **AND** to include additional keywords.

Use more specific, narrow search terms.

Use "quotation marks" to search for terms as phrases, e.g. "chocolate spread"

Use **NOT** to exclude keywords that are not relevant to your topic.

Use our [Search techniques sheet](#) for help with linking words (AND, OR, NOT) and search tricks (*, "", (), ?).

If your search is working as it should and you are getting just the right number of results and are all on topic, there's still lots you can do to expand your search:

Advance your search

Review the subject terms used by databases or the authors of key journal articles, and add any additional keywords to your search plan.

Explore your [Subject Guide](#) to check you've searched all relevant databases.

Consider alternative [information types](#) (e.g. conference proceedings, newspapers, government publications, audiovisual etc.) and the different perspectives they can bring to your work.

Investigate the authors of relevant articles or the outputs of relevant institutions – what else have they produced?

Conduct a [360 search](#) from a key article you have found – explore the references and who has cited this key article.

Use [social media](#) to keep up-to-date on new developments in your field.

Set up [search alerts](#) so you don't have to keep re-running your search to spot new journal articles as they're published.

Finding nothing useful?

If your search has brought back results that aren't relevant to your research question or you are finding it difficult to select the right search terms or databases to use, you might find it helpful to [book a one-to-one appointment](#) with your Liaison Librarian.

