

Creating a winning search strategy

Developing an effective search strategy involves identifying and combining the keywords used in an assignment topic or question. Having a successful search strategy will save you time, help you avoid missing relevant information and ensure you find the best information available.

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Deconstruct your assignment question

From topic to search

It is important to identify the task as distinct from the topic and find the key concepts. A key concept is an important idea in the question or statement. Once you have unpacked your assignment topic or question, you can identify the keywords and phrases to use in the search strategy.

Sample assignment question:

"Discuss yarnning circles as a communication tool in educational settings".

- What are the task words - what am I being asked to do?
- What are the keywords and phrases - what information do I need to find?

In the exercise below, look closely at the question. Identify the task words and the key search terms (words describing the topic or subject).

Discuss

Task word - you are being asked to discuss yarnning circles as a communication tool in educational settings

"yarning circles"

Key Search Term

as

not a key term

a

not a key term

communication

Key Search Term

tool

not a key term

in

not a key term

educational

Key Search Term

settings

not a key term

Select and combine search terms

Selecting your search terms

*"Discuss **yarning circles** as a **communication** tool in **educational settings**"*

Now that the keywords and phrases have been identified, consider any similar words (synonyms), different spellings and alternative endings.

Expand the examples below for more explanation on phrase searching, using synonyms and truncation.

"yarning circles"

Phrase searching - placing double quotation marks around terms will search for those words as an exact phrase, in that exact order. It helps to narrow down a long results list and find more relevant results.

communication OR conversation

Finding synonyms - including words that are similar to the key words you have selected from the topic, helps to ensure you do not miss relevant information. Separating these terms with an **OR** will find information that mentions one or more of these words.

educat*

Truncation - Adding an asterisk at the end of the stem of a word will search for all the possible endings for that word e.g. educat* will find educate, educating, education, educational etc.

Combining search terms (AND, OR, NOT)

Combining terms effectively can help you find the best results. Linking keywords with **AND, OR & NOT** enables you to cover all aspects of your topic.

AND	OR	NOT
will narrow your search	will broaden your search	will narrow your search

Placing AND between keywords will locate resources which contain both/all terms	Placing OR between keywords will locate resources which contain either, or all keywords	Placing NOT between keywords will locate results where the second keyword does not appear
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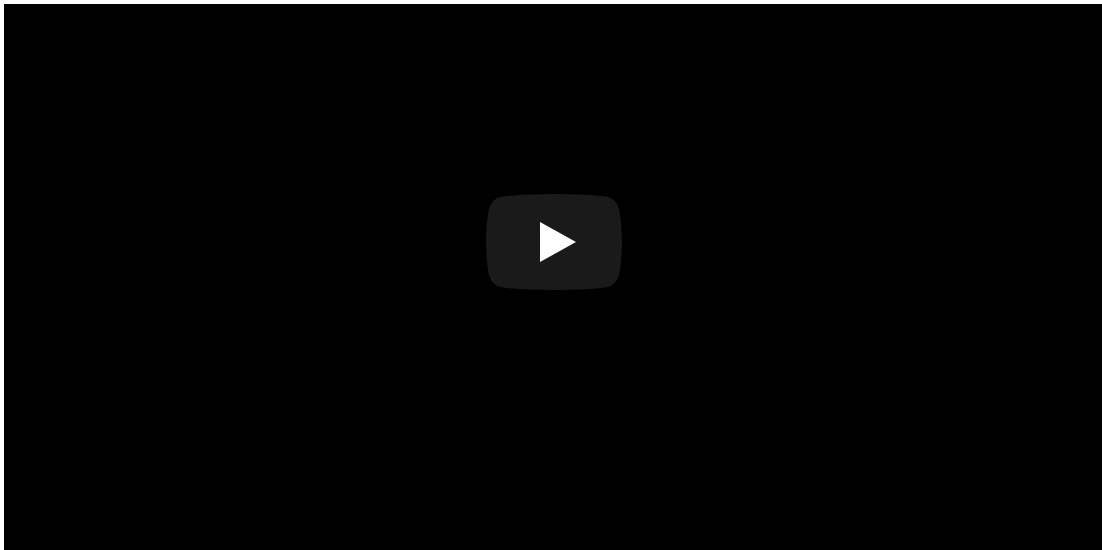
An example search string for the topic, *"Discuss yarning circles as a communication tool in educational settings"*, could be -

"yarning circles" **AND** (communication **OR** conversation) **AND** educat*

i Add round brackets to combine any identified synonyms and separate them with an OR.

Once you've located relevant material, most search engines and databases have filters to help you further refine results, by publication date, peer-review status, format or subject.

 YOUTUBE

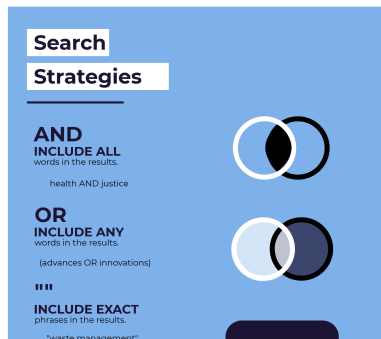


What are boolean operators?

Boolean searching is a search technique that allows you to combine keywords with operators (such as AND, OR, NOT) to produce more relevant results. Key links ...

[VIEW ON YOUTUBE >](#)

(Deakin Library, 2019)



(Image: USQ)

Adjusting your search

Evaluate your results

Searching involves trial and error; you may need to adjust your search terms depending on the results you find. Refer to the tips below if you are getting too many or too few results.

Too many results:

- add additional keywords or phrases
- refine your results by date, resource type, peer-review status or subject using filters

Too few results:

- check your spelling
- remove some of the keywords
- use alternative keywords and phrases

At every step of your search, it's crucial to evaluate your results for relevance, and against the criteria of your assignment.



Keeping on track

Finding good information is your goal.

[Reviewing your results](#) as you go ensures you are keeping on track.

Further help

Visit the Study Support guides below for further tips.

- 1 [Unpacking the topic](#) - get started on the right path
- 2 [Finding information](#) - how to find the correct information for your assignment
- 3 [Evaluating resources](#) - how you can effectively evaluate a text

The Library can help you plan or refine your search strategy.



Further help

usq.edu.au/library

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