

Developing a Search Strategy

STEP 1: Write down your search topic in the form of a question and underline the key words or phrases.

Example: *How does the government reduce unemployment and support small business owners?*

STEP 2:

⇒ Divide these key words into concepts and list them below. A key word can be just one word, or it can be a phrase, such as "small business owners." Since most search engines require you to put phrases in quotation marks (and sometimes parentheses), that is what you will see in the example below.

⇒ Use as many concepts as needed. List synonyms for each concept. Consider singular/plural forms, spelling variations, different word endings, etc.

Note about finding synonyms: not all thesauruses are created equal. If your list is pitifully short, look in more than one. For example, you can use the one in Microsoft Word in addition to something like Roget's International.

Example:

Concept 1: Government	Concept 2: Unemployment	Concept 3: "Small Business Owner(s)"
<i>Synonyms</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration • Congress 	<i>Synonyms</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joblessness • "Job loss" • "without a job" 	<i>This phrase won't appear in a thesaurus. Here is a good example of when you have to rack your brain.</i>
<i>Related terms</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy-maker(s) • Decision-maker(s) • Congressmen • Leaders 	<i>Related terms</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redundancy • Downsizing • Layoffs • Idleness 	<i>Turns out there are some related terms you can use:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneur(s) • Enterpriser(s)

Bear in mind some of these terms will be more useful than others; at this point, you want to exercise as many options as possible. The more related terms you think of, the more comprehensive your search will be.

Take the terms you underlined in Step 1 and fill in the table on the other side of this sheet. You don't need to follow the exact format; you can create your own table on a separate piece of paper if you like.

STEP 2, continued

Concept 1:	Concept 2:	Concept 3:
<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Synonyms</i>
<i>Related Terms</i>	<i>Related Terms</i>	<i>Related Terms</i>

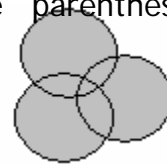
You're almost done—now you just need to put these terms together.

STEP 3: Construct your search strategy using Boolean operators, truncation, and parentheses.

Example: (govern* or adminstra*) AND (unemploy* or jobless*) AND ((small business owners) or entrepreneur*)

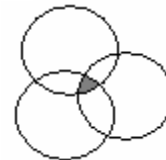
⇒ Connect the synonyms with the Boolean operator **or**. You must use parentheses around your synonyms connected with **or**.

Or *broadens* your search by gathering records in which one or more of your terms appear.



⇒ Connect the concept sets with the Boolean operator **and**.

And *narrows* your search by requiring that at least one term from each concept set be present in the results.



⇒ Use the appropriate truncation symbol (* ? : !) to search for words containing a common word root, with any number or combination of characters following that root.

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