Planning your search strategy

Follow these steps to plan your search. They will save you time in the long run!

1. Analysing the research topic

Your topic. Write down your search topic in the form of a question/s and underline the keywords or phrases

Example:

What are the environmental advantages/disadvantages of controlled burning, including the effect on flora and fauna?
What are the economic costs and benefits of controlled burning?
What other methods are available to reduce the incidence or intensity of bushfire risk?
What are some examples of past Australian programs of controlled burning, and what were the consequences for these programs?

Your topic. Now select three main concepts

Example: Concept 1: “controlled burning” Concept 2: bushfire

2. Thinking of alternative terms for your keywords

Translate your group’s three chosen concepts into alternative keywords (synonyms, antonyms, and alternative spellings)

Synonyms: words or phrases that have a similar meaning eg mobile phone, cellular phone or even antonyms eg focused vs preoccupied
Plurals more than one eg mobile phones (consider truncation)
Variant spellings eg US English vs Australian English – behaviour, behavior (consider wild cards eg behav?or )
Acronyms, Abbreviations – eg ICT or Information communication technology
Broader terms: eg Telephone equipment is broader than Mobile phone
Narrower terms: Type of mobile phone

Hint use the thesaurus of relevant database eg Compendex

Example:

Concept 1 "controlled burning" ? "prescribed burning" ? ? ?

Concept 2 bushfire ? “bush fire” ? “forest fire” ? “wild fire”
Using Connectors: AND, OR, NOT

Connectors are used to combine search terms. There are 3 connectors: AND, OR, NOT. These are described below:

**AND**
placed between words means both words must appear in each record. This will **narrow** your search.
For example, “washing machine” **AND** design will retrieve all records which contain both terms.

**OR**
placed between words means that either, or all, word/s may appear in each record. This will **broaden** your search.
For example, greywater **OR** graywater will retrieve all records with either greywater or graywater as well as both terms.

**NOT**
between words means that the second word must not appear in any record. This will **narrow** your search.
For example, “wastewater treatment” **NOT** chemical will retrieve all records with “wastewater treatment”, but **no** records with chemical and **no** records in which both “wastewater treatment” and chemical appear.
Take care when you use the **NOT** connector – you may lose useful information.

**TIP:**
Internet Search engines such as Google or Yahoo that search databases of internet pages use some special connectors of their own. They may use + (AND) and - (NOT) symbols as connectors.
Check each Internet search engine’s Advanced Search option of Help for more Information.