

Generating Search Terms

Search terms, or keywords, are the important words or phrases that serve as the building blocks for how you search for relevant sources in library catalogs, databases, and even Google. Using search terms will produce more effective results than searching for entire sentences or questions.

Selecting Search Terms

Below are some tips for selecting more effective search terms.

- ★ Identify the major concepts for your focus area or research question: e.g., *individual words* (typically nouns) and *short phrases*

Example: ~~What impact does~~ access to mental health resources ~~have on the~~ retention of first generation college students?

- ★ Where applicable, brainstorm synonyms and related terms for your major concepts that might also reflect your focus area or research question

Search Terms	Synonyms & Related Words
access	accessibility, barriers
mental health resources	counseling services, support groups, mental health, mental well-being
retention	retain, persistence
first generation college students	first gen

- ★ Avoid abstract or implied concepts such as
 - *relationship words*: compare, contrast, impact, correlation, etc.
 - *judgment words*: best, most effective, least, worst, etc.
- ★ Once you've tested your search terms in a library database or catalog, consider what other words or phrases you might incorporate as you revise your search.

Searching Pro Tip

If you have a search term that has variant endings, you can strategically replace the ending of that word with a truncation mark. In particular, use an asterisk (*) after the root of a word to bring back variants.

- **disabil*** retrieves **disability** and **disabilities**
- **disabl*** retrieves **disable**, **disables**, **disabled**, and **disabling**

Be careful not to cut off a word too soon or you'll also retrieve irrelevant terms:

- **disab*** retrieves **disability**, **disabilities**, **disable**, **disables**, **disabled**, **disabling**, *but also* **disabuse**, **disabused**, and **disabuses**

Using the space below, record your initial area of focus along with the aspects you are interested in researching. From there identify search terms (keywords) that could be used to research that topic. Identify these terms initially by noting major ideas or concepts in your area of focus and the aspects you're interested in researching. From there brainstorm synonyms (words with related meanings) and related terms that are connected to your area of research.

Use the form below to record your work.

Initial Focus Area:

What aspects of this focus area are you looking to research?

[illegible]