

Literature Searching

A literature search is an organised search for material on a subject topic. You can search using keywords, and narrow your search with tools such as [Boolean terms](#).

Databases enable you to search multiple journals and other sources, and enable you to gather a list of references, some of which may be available online. These references can often be saved, printed, emailed, or exported to bibliographic software. There are several steps to performing an effective literature search:

1. Decide on a search topic

Formulate a question or hypothesis to define the topic.

For example, if you are interested in finding out about the impact of smoking on children with asthma, you might ask the question "What are the effects of passive smoking on children with asthma"

2. Consider the keywords to use while searching

Identify the main keywords. In the above example the main keywords are highlighted, passive smoking, children, asthma.

Also remember to think about:

- Using broader and narrower terms e.g. smoking, cigarette smoke, nicotine.
- Using synonyms - these are different words with the same meaning e.g. passive smoking or tobacco or cigarettes not all words have these but if they do they should be included in your list of keywords.
- Using acronyms - this is where your keywords can be condensed into a set of capital letters e.g. VAT or Value Added Tax - use both the full term and the acronym when searching.
- Be aware of alternative spellings - remember to try UK and US spellings for example: labour or labor.
- Be aware of possible changes of place name, for example: Peking to Beijing.
- To find background information consult: encyclopaedias, dictionaries, bibliographies, textbooks.

3. Select a Database

- Look at the list of recommended databases on your [Subject](#) page

4. Tools to use when performing your search

- Use [Boolean operators](#) (AND, OR or NOT) to combine search terms.
- Truncation. A truncation character allows you to broaden your search by retrieving varying endings of your search term e.g Child* will retrieve articles that include the word child, children, childcare, children's, childhood.
- Wildcards. Substitute a wildcard symbol for letter(s) in a word. For example organi?ation will find organisation or organization. Wildcards are very useful in dealing with spelling variations. Remember symbols used may vary between the different databases, always check the individual database Help section.

- Phrase searching. This allows you to use a string of words instead of a single one. Many databases allow you to search for an exact phrase such as duty of care. However, some databases will require you to use inverted commas while other will require the use of brackets e.g. "duty of care". Check the Help section of the database.
- Change where your keywords are to be retrieved from by using database tools such as search in Abstract, Title, Author and so on.

5. Evaluate your results and refine your search

Select only relevant references. Check:

- Date
- Language (will you be able to read the original article?)
- Source (is it from a peer-reviewed journal or is it from a trade journal?)
- Identify the source material - is it a book, article, letter, thesis, patent etc.

6. Find out the availability of items at Surrey

While some databases contain full text articles others will require you to use the reference provided to search for the item elsewhere. You will need to check: Is the item available from the Library?

To do this, you can:

- Search [SurreySearch](#) for printed and electronic items.
- You can also click where you see Check for Full Text, from within the database, to help you to search.

7. Use Inter Library Loans to obtain items from other libraries

If the item is not available in the library, you may be able to request it via Inter Library Loan.

8. Additional help

Academic Skills and Development, on Level 1 of the Library, Learning Development Librarians provide drop-in sessions Monday - Friday.

Searching with Boolean Logic (AND, OR and NOT)

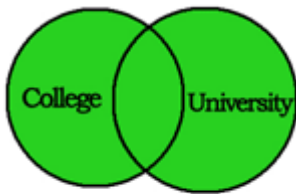
Boolean Logic is a way of narrowing or expanding a search by linking keywords with connecting words.



AND

- narrows a search by linking two or more terms

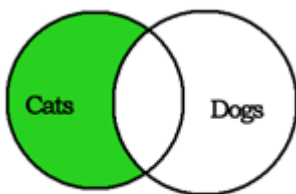
- use the connector AND to retrieve items that must have BOTH terms
- AND is used to combine different ideas or concepts
- only items represented by the shaded area are retrieved



College OR University

OR

- broadens a search by linking two or more terms
- use the connector OR to retrieve items that may have EITHER term
- OR is used to combine synonyms or related terms
- items represented by the shaded area are retrieved



Cats NOT Dogs

NOT

- narrows a search by excluding items containing a second search term
- use the connector NOT to find items that have the first term but not the second
- in the example, all items with the term cats will be retrieved except those also containing the word dogs
- only items represented by the shaded area are retrieved
- use NOT with caution; you may exclude relevant items