Developing a search strategy: quick user guide

When conducting research into a new topic area it is really important to think about the way in which you search for information. An effective search strategy will save you time and can help to ensure that you don’t miss any key resources.

**Good planning will:**
- ensure you find the key material for your assignment/essay/dissertation
- be helpful when you find too much information, or not enough
- be helpful when you don’t retrieve the results you expect
- improve the quality of your results
- save you time.

**Search strategy tips:**
The following process may be useful in formulating your search strategy:

1. Think about your research topic as a **question** or **series of questions**.
   For example: *What makes an effective manager in today’s global economy?*

2. Identify the **keywords** in your question.
   For example: *effective, manager, global economy*

3. Find **synonyms** (alternate terms) for each of your keywords. There may be many options.
   For example: *manager or executive or boss or person in charge*
   The more synonyms you use the more comprehensive your search.

4. Use **quotation marks** to search for phrases.
   For example: “global economy”

5. Apply **truncation** (often an asterisk *) at the end of a word to find variant endings and increase the number of matching items.
   For example: *effective* would find effective, effectiveness and effectively

6. Apply **wildcards** (often a question mark ?) to replace any single letter within a word to find variant spellings.
   For example: *globali?ation* will find globalisation and globalization

7. **Combine** the different elements of your search using **AND/OR/NOT**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AND</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>NOT (use with caution)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each result contains all the search terms.</td>
<td>Each result contains at least one search term.</td>
<td>Results do not contain the specified terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The search: manager? AND effective* AND “global economy”</td>
<td>The search: “global economy” OR “international competition”</td>
<td>The search: “global economy” NOT “global advertising” finds items that contain global economy but removes those that contain global advertising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finds items that contain all three search terms.</td>
<td>finds items that contain either search term.</td>
<td></td>
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8. Use **brackets** to bring together all the aspects of your topic into a concise search statement. For example: (manager? OR director? OR executive? OR boss OR “person in charge”) AND (effective* OR success* OR profitable OR lucrative) AND (“global econom*” OR global?ation OR “international business” OR “international competition” OR “international competitiveness”)

Many of the bibliographic databases use search grids which make combining the different aspects of your topic much more straightforward. Below you can see our example search transferred into a search grid on the database Business Source Premier:

The keywords for each element of the search are added into the three text boxes with the word “or” used to separate the different alternate terms. These terms are then combined using the “AND” option shown in the drop down menus on the left.

**Bibliographic databases for Management**

Bibliographic databases contain lists of references to all of the research that has been published across a broad subject area and are a vital source of information when conducting research. The databases index a range of resources including journal articles, country economic reports, market reports and business information.

The University Library subscribes to a large number of databases; these are all accessible via the E-resources Guide [http://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/e-resources](http://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/e-resources). You will need your University IT Services username and password to log in. The following databases are particularly relevant to Management students:

- **Business Source Premier** is a business research database providing access to the full text of more than 2,100 journals. The database also includes other sources of full text information such as country economic reports, market research reports, industry reports, SWOT analyses and detailed company profiles for the world’s 10,000 largest companies.

- **Passport GMID** is a global market research database providing statistics, market reports and comment on emerging industry, country and consumer trends.

- **Nexis UK** is a major full text database for global news and business information. It gives access to over 35,000 sources, with more than 12,000 international news sources including UK daily and regional newspapers (including the Financial Times), and company information for over 100 million companies worldwide.

- **Web of Science** (on Web of Knowledge) provides access to a number of databases giving abstracts for journal articles and conference proceedings, plus cited references and current awareness alerts. Databases of relevance to management: Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSH).