

# Hartnell College Library

Reference Department 831 759.6078/755.6872  
www.hartnell.cc.ca.us/library/

## Information Literacy 2 Search Strategy: *The Basics*

### Basic Steps

#### 1. Identify your question or what you want to know.

#### 2. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What sources are available?
- Will my textbook be enough?
- Should I look in an encyclopedia?
- Are there library reference books on my topic?
- Would the periodical indexes or databases have information on my topic?
- Will the Internet have the information I need?
- Which sources have the depth of information that I need?

#### 3. Choose the best sources for your topic or question.

- After answering the questions in step 2, choose the sources with the best information for your project.
- Use as many sources as you need.

#### 4. Find the location of each source.

- Library books, periodicals, or videos.
- Subscription databases on the Library's computer.
- Internet.

#### 5. Plan your search strategy.

- Think about your topic and how you are going search the resources.
- Write down keywords, synonyms, and alternative spellings.
- Be as specific as possible. If you don't find enough information, broaden your search.

#### 6. Familiarize yourself with the sources and learn how to use each source.

##### Discover how to find the information within the sources.

- Print sources
  - Look for an index.
  - Read the preface or introduction, or explanatory notes.
  - Examine the table of contents.
- Electronic sources
  - Read the help screens and FAQ's for each database.
    - Is phrase searching understood?
    - Does the database allow truncation?
    - Do proper names and nouns have to be capitalized?
  - Combine keywords. Look for Boolean operators.
  - Use links to related information.

Cats

## Searching Know-how

1. Boolean or combination search
  - Use operators AND, OR, NOT
  - AND *narrows* your search by combining topics
  - OR *broadens* your search By including any information on topics
  - NOT *narrows* your search by excluding information

AND  
dogs



NOT  
wild

The example of a Boolean search for information about **Cats AND Dogs NOT Wild** is illustrated by the circles above. The information retrieved is that information where all three circles intersect. You can see it is a specific section of the information.

2. Phrase search
  - Words linked together for a unique meaning
  - Some databases or search engines require quotation marks for phrase searching
    - “united states”
    - “bilingual education”
3. Truncation and Wild Cards
  - Uses a symbol to represent different endings or plural forms to the root word
  - Different databases may use different symbols.
  - Some databases automatically truncate.
    - librar? *searches for* library, libraries, librarian, librarianship, etc.
    - educat\* *searches for* educate, educated, educator, education, etc.
    - wom\*n *searches for* woman or women
4. Plus + and Minus – Commands
  - Using + in front of keywords allows you to mark certain words as essential to the search
  - Using – in front of keywords allows you to exclude certain words from the search
    - +carrot juice allows you to limit your search to carrot juice
    - “bilingual education” –ESL excludes ESL from your search results

## Helpful Web Sites

### Search Strategies

- UC Berkeley Library Recommended Search Strategy  
[www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Strategies.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Strategies.html)
- Noodle Quest: Develop the Ultimate Search Strategy  
[www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/information/4initiate/sharpsearch.html](http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/information/4initiate/sharpsearch.html)

### Search Engines

- UC Berkeley Library, The BEST Search Engines  
[www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/SearchEngines.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/SearchEngines.html)
- UC Berkeley Library, Subject Directories: The Best and More  
[www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/SubjDirectories.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/SubjDirectories.html)

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