

Developing an Effective Search Strategy

Information Literacy GEO this assignment addresses: Develops an Effective Search Strategy. Students will learn that there are many ways to describe a particular topic. An effective search strategy uses combinations of keywords linked with Boolean operators to provide results that are relevant.

Objectives of assignment:

- Students will be able to brainstorm for keywords, synonyms, and alternate phrases to describe their research topic.
- Students will learn how to use Boolean operators to link their keywords for effective searching.
- Students will use Academic Search Premier to test their search strategies and locate at least 2 articles related to their research topic.

Preparation:

This exercise requires the use of a computer lab for hands-on computer instruction. It requires the instructor to discuss brainstorming for keywords, describe Boolean operators, and show students how to access Academic Search Premier. The worksheet will help the students to narrow their searches.

Assignment: How Many Ways Can You Say the Same Thing?
Creating an Effective Search Strategy

1. The instructor should do a sample brainstorming session with the class by writing a topic on the board. Ask the class to come up with as many related words as possible and add them to the board.
Ex.) teenagers using drugs increases school drop-out rates
The many related terms: teenagers, adolescents, kids, children
school, education, high school, college
drugs, narcotics, marijuana, alcohol, smoking
drop-out, quit, truancy
increases, effects
2. Which terms would you use to find articles in a database? Talk about how you would combine some of these keywords or phrases using the boolean operators:
AND
OR
* (truncation device)
“ “ (use quotes around phrases)
Write down some of the actual search strings on the board.
Ex.) adolescent* AND “drug use” AND truancy

3. Show them how to access Academic Search Premier via the Lakeland Library website: <http://www.lakelandcc.edu/stuservi/library/index.html>
 - Click on Articles, Etc.
 - Go to Recommended
 - Then to Academic Search Premier (the 1st database listed here)

Point out the 3 boxes to enter search terms and the drop down boxes to change the Boolean operators. Leave the search page up on the screen as you distribute the worksheet.

4. Pass out the worksheet for students to develop a search strategy related to their own research topic. They should use the chart to brainstorm for keywords and look for the Boolean operators to link them. Circulate through the students as they work on their strategies and tell them the questions on the sheet are designed to help them think about the effectiveness of their searches. There are some tips to direct them to related articles. (looking for more keywords within the results and finding subject headings within the article descriptions)
5. Remind the students that they should find at least 2 articles related to their research topic.

Important summation/review points:

Ask the students if they have questions or were unable to narrow down their search to a reasonable amount of results. Other students may have some insight into solving a particular problem. Remind students again to look for subject headings and alternate keywords that appear within articles. There may be technical terms related to their topic that they do not know until they actually begin the research process. Keep trying different combinations and don't be afraid to ask for help!