Research Worksheet

Topic

Search Limits

- Languages:
- Publication Dates:
- Source Types:
    - □ Books
    - □ Journal Articles, Peer-reviewed only Yes/No
    - □ Popular Magazine Articles
    - □ Trade Magazine Articles
    - □ News
    - □ Dissertations & Theses
    - □ Statistics & Data
    - □ Conference Papers & Proceedings
    - □ Reports (e.g., Company, Country, Industry)
    - □ Videos & Audio
    - □ Other (specify):
- Other Limits:

Search Tools

Use **Discovery**, **Databases** and **Research Guides** on the **Library's home page** to identify databases and other search tools covering your topic and your search limits.

- Core Search Tools [in a field of study]:
- Secondary Search Tools [in other related fields of study]:

Search Terms

- Break your topic down into individual concepts.
- For each concept develop a list of synonyms, keywords, subject headings and descriptors.†
- Combine words describing the same concept with OR. Combine different concepts with AND.††
- Use truncation or wildcard symbols to pick up word variations.†††
- Use quotes " " around words to find exact phrases.

Concept A: search word **OR** another search word …

    AND

Concept B: search word **OR** another search word …

    AND

Concept C: search word **OR** another search word …

- Construct a search string using your search terms.
- Use parentheses **( )** when using a mix of Boolean operators.**††**

Search Results

Search Tool:

Date:

 # Results:

Notes:

Search Tool:

Date:

 # Results:

Notes:

Search Tool:

Date:

 # Results:

Notes:

†Concepts

To develop a list of words for each concept of your topic …
- check citations, abstracts, articles and bibliographies to identify terms used by authors writing in the field
- review the subject headings, descriptors and thesaurus terms used for the topic in catalogues, databases and other search tools
- continue to add words that come up frequently in your searching

††Combining Words using Boolean Operators - AND, OR, NOT

- **AND** = all of these words
  - example: communication **and** organizations
  - results will **include all** stated words
  - narrows search
- **OR** = any of these words
  - example: salary **or** compensation **or** income
  - results will **include at least one** of the stated words
  - broadens search
- **NOT** = none of these words
  - example: galaxy **not** phone
  - results will **exclude** stated word(s) following NOT
  - narrows search
  - ⚠ use with extreme caution since the NOT operator may result in the inadvertent loss of relevant results; there may be items that include both the wanted and unwanted terms and all would be eliminated from the results if the NOT operator is used
  - **( )** use parentheses when including more than one Boolean operator in a single search string
  - ensures stated words are combined and processed in the order intended
    - *without* **parentheses**, search terms will automatically be processed from left to right; the **AND** operator will be processed *before* the **OR** operator and the **NOT** operator will be processed last
    - to change the natural order of operations, place parentheses around words using the OR operator so that anything enclosed within parentheses is processed first; example: recruitment **and (**teachers **or** professors **or** instructors**)**

†††Truncation or Wildcard Symbols …

- can vary depending on the search tool being used; the asterisk ***** is the most common, but a dollar sign **$** or question mark **?** are often used as well; check the help section of your search tool to determine which symbol to use
- can be used to find word variations in a single search
  - manag***** finds manag**e**, manag**ement**, manag**ing**, manag**erial**, etc.
  - labo***** finds both lab**o**r [U.S. spelling] and lab**ou**r [British/Canadian spelling]
  - wom***** finds both wom**a**n [singular] and wom**e**n [plural]
  - ⚠ choose the placement of the symbol carefully, to avoid irrelevant results
    - for example, man***** will find man**age** and man**agement** , as well as man, man**ic**, man**ufacture**, Man**itoba** and other unintended words
    - if truncation proves problematic, spell out the desired word variations in full using the Boolean operator OR between them, for example: manage **or** management
- typically broadens a search

Innis Library – McMaster University
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