WELCOME TO OUR: "HOW TO" SERIES

HOW TO

develop a SEARCH STRATEGY

Cape Peninsula University of Technology Libraries
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INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF WHAT WE'VE TACKLED IN THIS LITTLE BOOK

You got an assignment from your lecturer, but what now? Where do you even start?

Many of you might go straight to Google and start typing some words into the search box. By doing this you will miss out and so will your marks! There is so much information out there and you will possibly receive thousands if not millions of results.

To save time and ensure that you find the exact information you need, you need to start by developing a search strategy.

You need to

CONSIDER

THE FOLLOWING:
YOUR TOPIC

YOU NEED TO HAVE A CLEARLY DEFINED TOPIC.

Remember when it comes to decisions in your personal life, you will have to identify your need and formulate your own search question to be able to start searching for information, for example buying a cellphone, house or taking out an insurance policy, etc.

To Make informed decisions you need correct information

Often your lecturer will give you a topic or in some cases you might have to develop your own. Let’s look at this example:

TOPIC: Discuss the use of social media for learning among university students
Identify Keywords

Identify the Key Concepts of Your Topic.

Topic:
Discuss the use of social media for learning among university students

The words "social media", "learning" and "university students" will be the key concepts that will form part of your search.

Words like "discuss", "use", "among", "for" are not key concepts and should NOT be included as part of your keywords.

In this topic we have identified 3 keywords:

social media  learning  university students
It is now important to identify words that mean the same as your keywords/concepts, in other words synonyms and/or broader or narrower terms. Why? So you search for all possibilities and don't lose out on relevant information. For these three concepts the words could be:

<table>
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<th>social media</th>
<th>learning</th>
<th>university students</th>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<td>YouTube</td>
<td>Training</td>
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<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>Undergraduates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>Acquiring knowledge</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
SEARCH TECHNIQUES

Once you have identified your keywords, you need to use these search techniques to find accurate results.

We will discuss these three search techniques:

- **BOOLEAN OPERATORS**
  - AND, OR, NOT

- **TRUNCATION**
  - wildcards *, ?

- **PHRASE SEARCHING**
  - “ ”
SEARCH TECHNIQUES

BOOLEAN OPERATORS:

AND, OR, NOT

Boolean logic has three connecting words, "AND", "OR", "NOT". These operators will help you to refine your search string. Let's look at what each of these can do:

AND

{Combining both terms - less results} Placing AND between two or more keywords retrieve only results including all of the keywords you entered.

OR

{Contains both words - more results} You use the OR to retrieve information in which any one of your keywords appear. This will give you MORE results.

NOT

{Excluding terms - less results} Placing the NOT before a search term excludes that specific term from your search results. This will give you LESS results.
SEARCH TECHNIQUES

TRUNCATION:

WILDCARDS *?

If you want information about politics, politicians, politician and political - these words all have the same stem.

Instead of searching each word separately, you can search them all at once by using truncation. You have to add a "wildcard" to the stem of the word. These "wildcards" are usually one of the following symbols: * (asterisk), ? (question mark), # (hash) or + (plus). The most common one is the * (asterisk).

(stem + wildcard) - let's look at this example:

By typing the word politi*, you will get information with all the options.

politi cs
politi cians
politi cian
politi cal
politi cally

For different spellings the wildcard * can be used

ORGANI*ATIONS COLO*R
SEARCH TECHNIQUES

PHRASE SEARCHING:

" "

Phrase searching is when you search using a string of words instead of a single word. Place your phrase in inverted commas. For example:

“most popular tourism attraction”

When standing alone, each word has a certain meaning. However, when you search them together as a phrase each word relates to the concept, e.g. "most popular tourism attraction".

By using phrase searching you will retrieve fewer results.
YOUR SEARCH STRING

CREATE A SEARCH STRING BY COMBINING YOUR KEY CONCEPTS AND SEARCH TECHNIQUES

Here are some examples using our topic:

"Discuss the use of social media for learning among university students"

social media AND learning AND university students

You can refine your search using synonyms as follows:

Facebook OR Twitter AND training AND undergraduates NOT Blackboard

Social media AND education AND young adults

and many more .....
THE SEARCH BOX

YOU HAVE DEVELOPED YOUR SEARCH STRATEGY, NOW IS THE TIME TO START YOUR SEARCH

Now that you have your search string (keywords + search techniques) you can start your search. Have a look at this example:

The above example retrieved 305 results. By changing the keywords, the following search string retrieved only 32 results.
THANK YOU

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