

Choosing Subjects, Keywords, or Phrases to Search

Keywords

- Keyword searching is a great place to start with your research on a topic. Keywords are determined by you, unique to your topic, should be as close to the main topic as possible, and can include obscure or recently coined phrases. Keyword searching is great when you want to combine several terms or concepts.
- Keyword searches look through many **fields** (title, author, notes, subject, etc.) to locate material records that mention your search term(s).
- You can *truncate* your search--locate multiple forms of a word--by adding a * to the end of the root word. Search results will include any applicable variation of your search term. (ie. depress*, teen*)

Choosing the right keywords can be a tough proposition: the easiest way to choose keywords is by taking your topic and forming its main points into a question.

Topic Question: Should insurance pay for homeopathic remedies?	
Topic Words:	Related Words:
homeopathic remedies	homeopathy, homeopathic medicine, alternative medicine, homeopath* (narrow aspects could include: acupuncture, massage, herbal medicine)
insurance	coverage, health insurance, insurance policy

→ Note that these words are all **nouns**. Nouns often make the best keyword searches.

Phrases

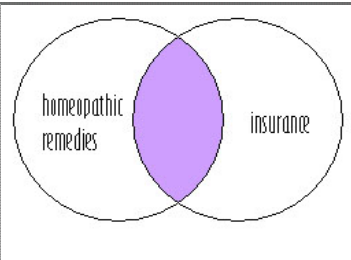
- Once you have a satisfactory list of keywords to search, an effective way of narrowing your search to a manageable number of relevant results is to combine those keywords into a phrase or "search string."
- Using a search string is great with you can't express your search topic in a single word.
- One way to search for a specific phrase is to enclose the words with quotation marks. This tells the index to search for those specific words in order, together. ie. "homeopathic remedies"
- If you want to search for a longer phrase with more than two keywords, you can create search strings by adding **Boolean** search terms such as AND, OR, or NOT.

Combining Terms

AND

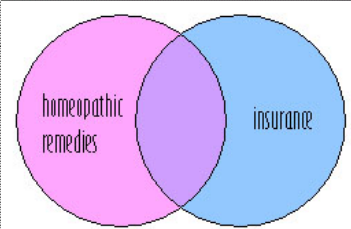
Placing the word **and** between two or more keywords **narrows** your search. *And* tells the catalog or database to retrieve materials whose records contain all of the keywords you enter.

- A search of "homeopathic remedies" **AND** insurance finds items that contain **both** terms.



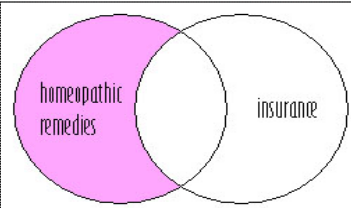
OR
Placing *or* between your keywords **broadens** your search, and brings back materials whose records contain at least one of the keywords you enter. Beware: the relevancy of results may decrease.

- A search of "homeopathic remedies" **OR** insurance finds items containing **either or both** search terms.



NOT
Placing *not* between keywords **excludes specific words** from your search.

- Searching "homeopathic remedies" **NOT** insurance will net results that contain the phrase "homeopathic remedies" but **do not contain** the word insurance.



Subjects

- Subject searches are the best way to locate material on your *specific* topics.
- However, you must know the correct Library of Congress Subject Heading (also called controlled vocabulary).
- Accessing the correct controlled vocabulary is easy!
- Perform a keyword search and look for an item relevant to your topic. Bring up the catalog record of the item. Scroll down: the subject headings/controlled vocabulary are listed under "subject." For this example, the phrase "homeopathic remedies" was searched.

Example of subject headings in a CLICnet library catalog record:

Author	McCabe, Vinton.	
Title	Practical homeopathy : a comprehensive guide to homeopathic remedies and their acute uses / Vinton McCabe	
Pub Info	New York : St Martin's Griffin, 2000.	
Edition	1st ed.	
LOCATION	CALL #	STATUS
CSC Circ. Collection	RX73 .M38 2000	AVAILABLE
Descript	xxxi, 592 p. ; 24 cm.	
Subject	Homeopathy -- Handbooks, manuals, etc.	
	Homeopathy -- Materia medica and therapeutics -- Handbooks, manuals, etc.	
Med Subject	Homeopathy.	
ISBN	0312206690	
LCCN	99026936	
OCLC#	ocm41096287	
	44511571 44609900	

Subject Headings

- Locate a subject heading relevant to your topic.
- Continue your search by clicking on the subject heading link. This often will take you to an alphabetical index of subject headings, which can help you to further narrow your search. Click on an additional subject heading. Example: clicked on Homeopathy.
- You've completed a subject search! All results include materials whose contents specifically focus on homeopathy. You **do not** need to be concerned with weeding out irrelevant or useless results.
- As an added bonus, you can use your newly learned controlled vocabulary term to help in future searches. Whenever presented with a search box that gives you the option to search subjects, you're prepared.