

# Quick guide to Database Searching

## 1. Defining your topic

Be clear about your topic or area of research. Write down exactly what you are interested in.

It is important to break your topic down into concepts (usually nouns rather than verbs or adjectives). Do not type in the title of the assignment or use long descriptive phrases when searching as this will only find articles with that *exact* phrase in the title or abstract.

Example: *“Evaluate the impact of the Internet on practices for recruitment and selection employed by firms.”*

Key **concepts** for this assignment would be:

- **internet**
- **recruitment and selection**
- **firms**

## 2. Choosing keywords

Produce a list of keywords. Consider all possible words or phrases that might be used to describe your subject. These could include:

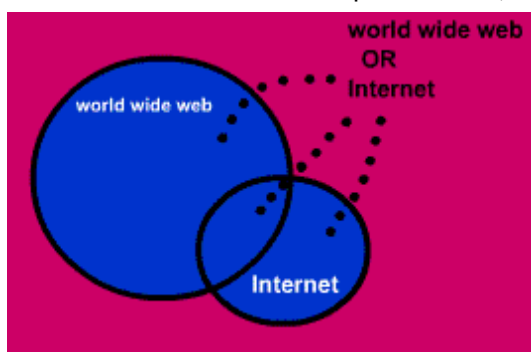
- Synonyms (words that mean the same thing)
- Alternative terminology and spelling (US & UK).
- Related terms (broader or narrower)
- Variations in word endings (e.g. singular, plural, adjectives).

From our example the following list of **keywords** can be identified:

- **Internet, world wide web, www**
- **recruitment, selection, personnel, human resources, human resource management**
- **firm(s), company(ies), business(es), organis/zation(s)**

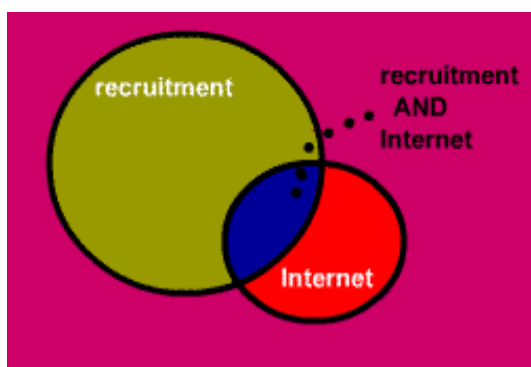
## 3. Combining keywords

To retrieve relevant information you need to be able to link concepts / keywords together. Most databases use the Boolean operators **OR**, **AND** and **NOT** to do this.



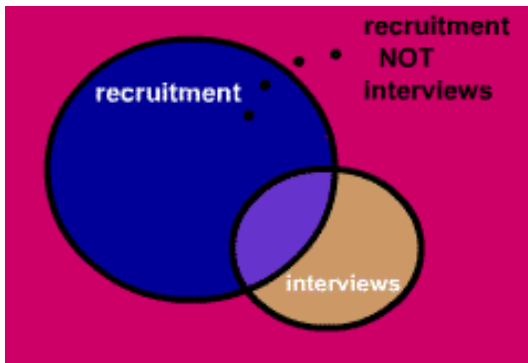
**OR** - Used for words which have a similar meaning i.e. synonyms, alternative terminology or spellings This broadens your search and increases the number of results.

e.g. **Internet OR world wide web**



**AND** - Used to link different concepts. This narrows your search and reduces the number of references.

e.g. **Internet AND recruitment**



**NOT** – Used to exclude terms from your search. However, this should be used with caution as you may exclude potentially relevant articles.

e.g. **recruitment NOT interviews**

Some databases use their own versions of Boolean Logic (e.g. **&** instead of **AND**) or may specify that these operators (AND, OR) are entered in upper case. It is always worth checking the help page to see which symbols are used.

#### 4. Truncation and Wildcards

Truncation allows you to broaden your search by retrieving all words with the same stem but variant endings. Type in the stem plus the truncation symbol (\$, ? or \* depending on which database you are using).

e.g. **recruit\*** will retrieve recruit, recruitment, recruiting, recruits, etc.

Wildcards can be used to replace one or more characters within a word thus allowing you to search for variant spellings.

e.g. **organi?ation** will retrieve both organisation or organization

#### 5. Refining your search results

If you get too many results you may need to narrow the focus in order to increase the precision of the search:

- add additional keywords with **AND**
- use more specific keywords
- limit search to particular fields
- limit publication year

If you get too few or no articles you need to expand the search to include all possible terms:

- check your spelling
- use truncation
- use all possible synonyms, alternative terminology/spelling and combine these using **OR**
- use broader keywords

#### Search strategy checklist

1. Define the topic and break it down into concepts
2. Choose your keywords/phrases to describe concepts
3. Combine the keywords
4. Consider using truncation and/or wildcards.
5. Try out the search and evaluate the results.
6. Refine the search if necessary.