

## Doing the Research

### *Developing a Search Strategy*

**Step 1** – Generate CONCEPTS from your topic and subtopics. (Concepts can be words or phrases.) You will use these concepts to develop a list of keywords for searching.

Example:

Topic – the influence of MTV on today's youth culture

Subtopic – MTV's audience

Subtopic – MTV's programming

Subtopic – MTV's popularity

Subtopic – criticism of MTV

CONCEPTS –

- MTV
- Youth
- Audience
- Programming
- Popularity
- Criticism

*Note* – You may also use your **thesis statement** to identify concepts. Occasionally, your thesis statement will reveal more concepts to be searched.

Example:

Thesis – In idealizing and simplifying gender roles and relationships, MTV helps limit the expectations of today's youth.

CONCEPTS –

- Gender roles
- MTV
- Youth

**Step 2** – Develop keywords for each concept. You will use the keywords or combinations of the keywords to search for print and electronic resources.

Example:

**CONCEPTS**

1. MTV
2. Popularity
3. Audience
4. Programming
5. Gender roles
6. Youth
7. Criticism

The words you chose for each concept can be keywords. For each of your concepts, try to think of other words to describe that idea and add that to your list of keywords. (Sample worksheet available on the SHG Library and Media Center website.)

CONCEPT 1		CONCEPT 2		CONCEPT 3
MTV	and	Popularity or Ratings	and	Audience or Viewership

CONCEPT 4		CONCEPT 5		CONCEPT 6
Programming or Programs or Shows	and	“Gender roles” or “Gender identity” or “sex role” or Masculinity or Femininity	and	Youth or Children or Teens or Teenagers or “Young Adults”

CONCEPT 7		CONCEPT 8		CONCEPT 9
Criticism or Critics	and		and	

*Note* – Keywords can be a word or phrase. If your keyword is a phrase, be sure to put it in quotations. (You will need to do this when searching the internet, a database, or the library catalog.)

**Try to be as specific as possible when developing your list of keywords.**

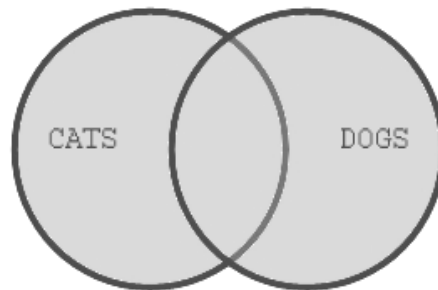
**Step 3** – Use Boolean operators – AND, OR, NOT – to connect keywords and concepts to form your search strings. You will input these search strings into the search boxes of an internet search engine, a database, or the library catalog. The search interface will vary. If you need help inputting your search string, ask the librarian for assistance.

### **Step A**

Within each concept, connect keywords or phrases with the **OR** operator. *OR broadens* a search specifying that any of the keywords may appear in the bibliographic record or document.

Example: cats **OR** dogs

This search will retrieve any record or document that contains the words cats or dogs.



Working example:

Concept 3 – (audience OR viewership)

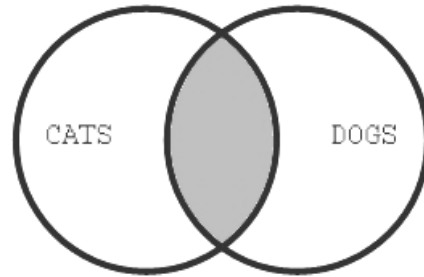
*Note* – By putting parentheses around each concept, you will avoid confusion when combining concepts in Step B. You will also avoid computer processing errors when searching online, a database, or the library catalog.

### **Step B**

Connect different concepts together with **AND** or **NOT**.

Example (AND): cats **AND** dogs

This search will retrieve any record or document that contains both cats and dogs.

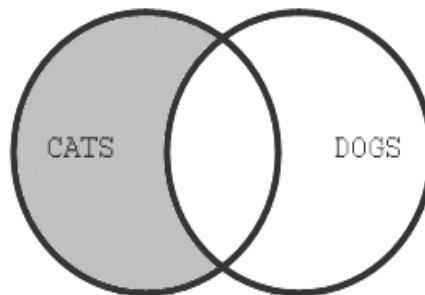


Working example (AND):

Concept 1 AND Concept 3 – MTV **AND** (audience **OR** viewership)

Example (NOT): cats **NOT** dogs

This search will retrieve any record or document that contains only the word cats but not the word dogs.



Working example:

Concept 1 NOT Concept 7 – MTV **NOT** (criticism **OR** critics)

*Note* – Using the operator **NOT** will dramatically reduce the amount of records you will retrieve.

**Step 4** – Selecting information sources and searching. You will need to select different sources depending on the type of information required.

*Note* – Read your assignment. Your teacher may have specific requirements regarding the type of sources you may use for a particular assignment.

Sources	Type of information	Where to search	
Books	Ranges from contemporary to historical information. May report facts or statistics and provide analysis.	SHG Library Catalog	<b>Rolling Prairie Library System Catalog</b>
		Other Catalogs	<b>I-Share Catalog</b>
			<b>Alex Catalog of Electronic Texts</b>
		Databases	<b>Project Gutenberg</b>
FirstSearch <b>WorldCat</b>			
EBSCOHost <b>Health Source</b> (health-related <i>reference</i> books)			
		EBSCOHost <b>MAS Ultra</b> (various general and subject specific <i>reference</i> books)	
Articles (Magazine, Journal, & Newspaper)	Good source for recent or current information. May range from local to international information and may include statistics, polls, reports, etc.	Magazine Databases	EBSCOHost <b>MAS Ultra</b> (multidisciplinary)
			EBSCOHost <b>Health Source</b> (health-related magazines)
			EBSCOHost <b>TOPICsearch</b> (current events topics)
			EBSCOHost <b>Advanced Placement Source</b> (multidisciplinary)
		Academic Journal Databases	EBSCOHost <b>Advanced Placement Source</b> (multidisciplinary)
			EBSCOHost <b>ERIC</b> (Education Resource Information Center)
			EBSCOHost <b>Professional Development Collection</b> (Education journals)
		Newspaper Databases	EBSCOHost <b>Newspaper Source</b> (full-text regional, national, and international newspapers)
			EBSCOHost <b>TOPICsearch</b> (current events topics)
		Government Publications	Good source for current or historical government studies, reports, or statistics.
Internet	Use an internet search engine such as Google to locate Government Websites (websites with the .gov domain)		

*Note* – EBSCOHost and FirstSearch are database providers. The actual databases are in bold.

*Remember* – The search interface will vary depending on the catalog, database, or search engine you use. If you need help, please ask the librarian for assistance.

## *Evaluating Information Sources*

Finding information is just one step in the research process. It is important to determine which sources are most useful, reliable, and relevant. Use the following criteria to evaluate your information sources.

### **Date of Publication**

- Your research assignment and your topic will help you determine the currency of the information that you need.

Example: If you are researching the influence of MTV on today's youth, you will need to find current information. A source from 1995 or even 2001 will be out of date.

Example: If you are researching popular culture in the Jazz Age as related to F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, you will need historical information. You may use current as well as older publications. A source published in 1980 may be just as relevant as a source from 2009.

*Note* – It is helpful to define a date range for your information sources before you begin searching.

- Be aware of further editions of a source which indicate that the source has been updated to reflect new information.

### **Relevancy of Content**

- Examine the source to ensure that the content matches your topic.

Articles – read the abstract (short summary) of the article. If the article has an abstract, it will be located at the beginning of the article. Oftentimes, an abstract will be provided by the database you are searching. If there is no abstract, skim the article.

Books – You do not need to read the entire book. Read the preface and scan the table of contents or the index to get an overview of the source. Use the index to find information specifically about your concepts.

- Always check to see if the source includes a bibliography or list of references. A bibliography is a strong indication that the source is reliable. Also, bibliographies will lead you to more sources.

## **Intended Audience**

- Consider the intended audience of the source. If the source is aimed at a specialized audience, it may be too difficult to read and understand; therefore, it may not be useful. In contrast, if the source is meant for a younger audience, the information may be too general.

## **Credibility of the Author**

- Examine the credentials (education, research background, etc.) of the author. A credible author will be an expert in the field. Most likely, a credible author will have a degree in the applicable discipline. Also, a credible author will have published other articles, papers, reports, or books on the same topic.

## **Objective vs. Biased**

- Materials should be unbiased and objective (unless otherwise properly identified).
- Your research assignment and your topic will help you determine if biased information is inappropriate.

Example: If you are researching the influence of MTV on today's youth, you may want to incorporate subjective information into your paper. Remember, you should identify the information as biased and subjective.

## **Scholarly vs. Popular (Articles)**

- Your research assignment and your topic will help you determine whether you need scholarly or popular articles.

Example: If you are researching the influence of MTV on today's youth, you may need to use a combination of scholarly and popular resources. The popular resources will provide you with popular opinion of MTV etc. while the scholarly resources will provide you with research or statistics relating to MTV.

Example: If you are researching popular culture in the Jazz Age as related to F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, you will need historical, scholarly information. Popular information would not be useful in this situation.

- A popular article comes from a magazine (i.e. People, Time, Sports Illustrated, Newsweek, etc.). A scholarly article is published in a journal (i.e. Journal of Experimental Education, Studies in English Literature, Physics Today, Literary Review, etc.).

- If you are unfamiliar with the publication (the magazine or journal), use the following criteria to identify your article as scholarly or popular.

	<b>Scholarly</b>	<b>Popular</b>
<b>Content</b>	Report original research or experimentation, often in a specific academic discipline.	Cover news, current events, hobbies, or special interests.
<b>Intended Audience</b>	Target audience is the scholarly researcher, faculty, and students.	Targeted at the general public and are available to a broad audience.
<b>Author Credentials</b>	Articles are written by experts in the field.	Usually written by a member of the editorial staff or a freelance writer.
<b>Language</b>	Articles use jargon of the discipline, and assume a familiarity with the subject.	Language is geared for any educated audience and does not assume familiarity with the subject.
<b>Illustrations</b>	Illustrations are few and support the text, typically in the form of charts, graphs, and maps.	Include many illustrations, often with large glossy photographs and graphics.
<b>Citations</b>	Articles include footnotes or bibliographies using a standardized citation format (i.e. MLA, APA, or Chicago).	While sources may be cited, popular articles usually do not include footnotes or a bibliography.

### **Primary vs. Secondary**

- In your research, you will incorporate both primary and secondary sources.

**Primary** sources are original texts such as speeches, literary works, eyewitness accounts, autobiographies, historical documents, etc.

**Secondary** sources include materials written about the primary sources such as articles, biographies, commentaries, critical interpretations, reviews, etc.

## Evaluating Websites

It is especially important to be aware of the large amount of available information on the Internet. Much of this “information,” while perhaps interesting to read, is **NOT** appropriate for a research paper. Therefore, it is necessary to critically evaluate the information you find on the web.

If you apply the following criteria and ask certain questions about a website, you will be able to determine if the website is reliable and credible.

- **Authority**

- Does the site have an author?
- What are the author’s qualifications or expertise in the area?
- Who sponsors or publishes the website?

*Note* – Internet search engines such as Google may retrieve pages out of context. It is important to return to the homepage of the site to identify the correct author or publisher information.

- **Accuracy**

- Is the information accurate and verifiable?
- Does the site document the sources used? (Does the site have a bibliography?)
- How does the information on the site compare with the information you already know or have found in other reliable resources?

- **Currency**

- Is the site up-to-date?
- When was the site created?
- When was the site last updated?
- Are the links expired?

- **Purpose**

Is the website meant to:

- *Inform* – about current events, new information, etc.
- *Explain* – teach, instruct, etc.
- *Persuade* – change your mind, sell you something, etc. (watch for excessive advertising or pop-ups)

The domain name and the source of the URL may give an indication of a site's intended audience. Familiarity with the common domain names will give you clues to the site's credibility and reliability.

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Example</b>
.edu	Created at a college or university	www.indiana.edu
.gov	Created by an official U.S. federal agency or office	www.federalreserve.gov
.org	Varies – in most cases the site was created by a nonprofit organization or an individual	www.npr.org
.com	Varies – in most cases the site was created by a for-profit organization	www.amazon.com
.net	Varies greatly – often indicates that a site was created by a person, group, etc. that uses an internet service provider	www.earthlink.net

*Note* – There may be a more reliable and credible print alternative available in the library. Also, you may need to find additional print resources to verify the information you find on the Internet.

***Remember*** - Refer to the SHG Library and Media Center website for further research tools and ask the librarian for assistance in finding the best information sources, both print and electronic.