

Literature search: Building a search strategy

1. **Have a clear idea of your topic.** Do a scoping search to see what has been published recently in your topic area, try browsing recent articles in peer reviewed journals to see what are “hot topic” areas.
2. **Define your topic area:**
 - Write out your topic, for example “*Behaviours associated with children being independent learners in school*”. Then identify the keywords for the terms that you want to search for.
 - Under each keyword make a list of alternative terms and/or spellings. Think about American/alternative spellings, e.g color/colour; alternative endings of words, i.e. truncation, behavio* will retrieve behavior, behaviour, behavioral and behavioural.
 - Use AND, OR, and NOT to link your search terms together to narrow or broaden your search. The help section in each database will guide you on the best way to search that database.
 - Try using quotation marks around your phrase searches to narrow your results.
3. **Set limits on your search:**
 - Publication date – do you want to search for more recent resources or how far back? Use the limit by date range option.
 - Geographical scope – are you just interested in material relating to a particular country or countries or all geographical areas?
 - Language – i.e. the language that the resource is written in or that you can read yourself, or is it appropriate to include other language material
 - What about other limiters to your research, for example; by age or gender?
 - Place of publication - do you want only material published in a particular country or range of countries?
4. **Use any relevant articles** you find to locate other relevant articles, read the reference list or bibliography at the end of an article, also scan for alternative keywords, related topics.
5. **Keep a record.** Make sure you keep accurate records of any resources that you consult through your literature search for your bibliography and to avoid any potential plagiarism issues. Use a reference management software such as [RefWorks](#) (available from the Online Library) to do this.
6. **Review your progress.** Found too little or too much? Use the advanced search box, to search just within the title field or abstract field and this can help you find more focussed results. You may also need to redefine your topic or change your keywords.

