Searching databases
Techniques for better results

1. Keyword searching
2. Phrase searching
3. Boolean searching
4. Using limiters
5. Subject heading searching
6. Field searching
7. Other useful features of databases

[also known as just “Subject Searching”]

What are subject headings?

- ‘Tags’ assigned by vendors to each article in their database.
- What works in one database won’t necessarily work in another.
- Assigned by experts who have read the document, and determined what standard terms should be used.

Why use subject headings?

- Highly effective way to find focused information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword Searching</th>
<th>Subject Heading Searching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good for obscure or emerging topics</td>
<td>Good for general and universal topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can generate many irrelevant results</td>
<td>Lists highly relevant results for each topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible - can use any term to describe topic to find relevant information</td>
<td>Need to know specific subject heading or vocabulary to search in subject heading list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will search for keyword in any field</td>
<td>Will only search in subject heading field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Combining Subject and Keyword searches

Searching is not a one-step process that has one right answer. Using a combination of searching techniques generates the most relevant results.

Here’s how to approach it:

1. Conduct a keyword search
2. Find a few relevant results
3. Find out the subject headings for those results
4. Use that subject heading for your next search step
5. Find out the subject headings for those results
6. Find more related concepts from those resources

Let’s look at that in action…

Video demonstration

Let’s look at that in action…

Video demonstration
In summary

- Subject heading searching can quickly focus your results
- Subject headings are assigned by experts
- Each database will have different subject searching options, so familiarise yourself with the particular database you use