

HOW TO DEVELOP A SEARCH STRATEGY

What is a search strategy?

A search strategy is a plan outlining how you are going to search for information. There are three basic steps in building a search strategy:

1. Finding the focus of your question

You need to ask questions about your topic.

For example,

How has Australia's relationship with South East Asia changed since 1945?

Some relevant questions might be:

- What elements of the relationship? political? military? economic?
- What was the state of the relationship in 1945? What is it now?
- What about Australia's relations with individual countries in South East Asia?

2. Identifying key concepts

Break down your question into parts or concepts. You can combine the concepts using AND and OR.

In the example above, the main concepts are: Australia, relationship, and South East Asia.

3. Finding alternative terms

You should think about:

- Acronyms (abbreviations, e.g. chief executive officer, CEO)
- Synonyms (e.g. public service, civil service)
- Plural/singular forms (e.g. woman, women)
- Spelling variations (e.g. behavior, behaviour) American and Australian spelling
- Variations of a root word (e.g. feminism, feminist, feminine). Use relevant truncation symbol to search on all the variations

Building on the example above:

Concept	Alternatives
Australia's	Australia, Australian, Australians
Relationship	relations diplomacy alliances trade cooperation
South East Asia	ASEAN <i>individual SE Asian countries</i> (e.g. Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, etc)

To **BROADEN** your search (i.e. to increase the amount you find),

- Reduce the number of concepts you are using
- Use an OR search
- Look for alternative terms
- Use more general search terms
- Use truncation to get variations on your term

To **NARROW** your search (i.e. to reduce the amount you find),

- Use an AND search
- Look for more specific alternative terms
- Use more precise terms
- Remove any truncation

Where Should I Start Looking?

Type of Information	Sources	Where to look
Background information	Reference books, encyclopedias	Library catalogue
Comprehensive information	Books	Library catalogue
Current or up to date information	Journals, newspapers, Internet	Databases, search engines and web subject gateways

(Based on Monash Library's *How to develop a search strategy*
<http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/vl/sstrat/sstrcon.htm>)