Searching Strategies

Use this handout to help you save time and effort while searching for information! Learn to incorporate phrases, truncation, and Boolean Operators into your advanced search in SuperSearch.

1. Draft your research question.

To begin building an effective search, start with your research question or topic. We will be using this example:

*How does bullying affect productivity in the workplace?*

2. Develop search terms.

Identify the most important topics your research question (2-4 topics). In this example, there is an intervention topic, a main topic, and a population.

*How does bullying affect productivity in the workplace?*

(intervention topic) (main topic) (population)

Then, brainstorm other words or phrases that have similar meanings (e.g. teenager, youth, adolescent).

Intervention Topic: bullying harassment aggression

Main Topic: productivity performance

Population: workplace work environment employee

3. Use phrases and truncation.

Add quotation marks to search terms that are phrases. Placing quotation marks around phrases will prevent SuperSearch or other databases from searching each word separately.

Example: “work environment” will find results that mention that exact phrase, instead of results that contain both work and environment in different places.

For search terms that could have multiple endings, use truncation. Truncation locates multiple forms of a word, including different endings. By adding an asterisk (*) to the end of a root word, search results will include any applicable variation of the search term.

Example: harass* will find results that contain harass, harassing, and harassment.
Using phrases and truncation changes our search terms like this:

- **Intervention Topic:** bully* harass* aggression
- **Main Topic:** productiv* performance
- **Population:** workplace “work environment” employee

### 4. Incorporate Boolean Operators

Boolean Operators are the words AND, OR, and NOT. Using Boolean Operators allows you to both broaden and narrow your search results, depending on how you use them. Don’t worry if you’re confused the first few times you use them – it takes practice!

**AND** retrieves results that include all of the search terms you enter. This narrows your search and increases the relevancy of your search results.

**Example:** bully* AND workplace

**OR** searches for synonyms of your search terms. OR broadens your search, allowing SuperSearch to find at least one of the search terms.

**Example:** productiv* OR performance

**NOT** excludes a specific term from your search results. NOT narrows your search by eliminating results that contain the search term that you have excluded, even if those results do contain your other search terms. NOT gets used less often than AND or OR. It’s typical to add NOT to your search after you begin to see irrelevant search results.

**Example:** workplace NOT hospital

In the example above, we can place OR in between words in each of our rows. For example, bully* OR harass* OR aggression will find results that contain at least one of those search terms.

We can then use AND in between each of our topics. We are now searching for results that contain at least one of the search terms from our first row, AND at least one of the search terms from our second row, AND at least one of the search terms from our third row.

In this example, we aren’t using NOT.
5. Enter search terms

Below is the Advanced Search in SuperSearch. You can add more search boxes by selecting 🔄. The Boolean Operator AND is set as a default in the dropdown menu in between each search box. You can change it to OR or NOT.

![Advanced Search](image1)

Let’s use the search terms from page 2 as an example. Enter the search terms from row one into the first search box. Make sure to type OR in capital letters, as shown. Then, copy rows two and three into the second and third search boxes.

To reiterate, we are searching for results that contain at least one of the search terms from our first search box, AND at least one of the search terms from our second search box, AND at least one of the search terms from our third search box.

![Advanced Search](image2)

If you are using the single search box instead of the Advanced Search, you can enter the search terms from each row within parentheses with the Boolean Operator OR between each term. Then, add the Boolean Operator AND between each set of parentheses.

![Single Search](image3)

6. Refine search results.

Look through your search results. Do you need to add or change your search terms? Would your results be more relevant if you narrowed the date range or limited your results to peer-reviewed journal articles?

Learn more about searching in SuperSearch: [http://tinyurl.com/nyxd7zu](http://tinyurl.com/nyxd7zu)
PRACTICE

1. Draft your research question.

Fill in the blanks below to write your research question, or write it out using the lines provided.

How does __________________ affect __________________ in __________________?

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

2. Develop search terms.

Identify the most important parts of your research question, and write them below (one for each concept row). Then, list words or phrases that have similar meanings (e.g. teenager OR youth OR adolescent). The Boolean Operator OR has been added for you.

Intervention Topic: __________________ OR __________________ OR __________________

Main Topic: __________________ OR __________________ OR __________________

Population: __________________ OR __________________ OR __________________

3. Use phrases and truncation.

Add quotation marks to your search terms (above) that are phrases. Next, determine if any of your search terms would benefit from being truncated (e.g. teen*).

4. Enter search terms.

1. Go to the Advanced Search in SuperSearch.
2. Log in with your Saint Mary’s username and password (off-campus only)
3. Enter your search terms for your intervention topic into the first search box. Remember to type OR in capital letters between each search term. Do the same for your main topic and population in the second and third search boxes.
4. Select Search.

5. Refine search results.

Look through your search results to find other relevant search terms, and revise your search if necessary. Use limiters (e.g. Date, Type of Resource, Subjects) on the left-hand side of your search results to further refine your search.