

# Library Information Skills Workshop | Designing a search strategy

## 1. Analyse your research topic: break it down into its component parts

Identify the key concepts in your topic; there may be two or three different ones. Concepts can be expressed in different ways, e.g. *cognition* might be referred to as *knowledge* or *perception* so think about alternative ways in which you can describe each of the key concepts you identified. This will broaden your search.

In the blank box write the key concepts in your topic and any synonyms or related words you may have thought of. Also write any phrases and authors that come to mind. The words don't have to be in any order. Note acronyms, singular and plural forms, different word endings and spelling differences, e.g. US and UK English forms. Note leading researchers and research institutions. Note any limiting factors in your search, e.g. date range, document type.

## 2. Now group your terms together using the grid below

Look at the first important concept in your assignment. Do you have more than one word for that concept? If yes, place the words you have thought of in the first row of the grid below. Alternative words and synonyms are linked with the word OR in uppercase. Take the words you have thought of for the second concept and write them in the second row. If you have a third concept, write this and any related term in the third row. Use AND in uppercase to combine different groups of keywords. You can then apply your search strategy to Primo or a database.

terms for concept 1		OR		OR	
	<b>AND</b>				
terms for concept 2		OR		OR	
	<b>AND</b>				
terms for concept 3		OR		OR	

### 3. Improve your search by applying the relevant search rules. See overleaf for common search rules

**Example topic:** ‘Discuss the role of mobile phones in the development of cancer’

In the box below, we wrote all phrases that came to mind regarding the above hypothetical assignment. The words are not in any order.

mobile phone, cell phone, cancer, mast, mobile phones, cellular phones, tumour, tumor, smart phones, lesions, malignant, benign, electromagnetic

We then grouped our words together. In the first row we placed all the words we thought of for our first concept. In the second row we wrote the words we have thought of for the second concept. We also came up with a third concept for this topic. The relevant words have been placed into the third row.

<b>terms for concept 1</b> (mobile phones)	“mobile phone*”	OR	“cellular phone*”	OR	“cell phone*”
	<b>AND</b>				
<b>terms for concept 2</b> (cancer)	cancer*	OR	tumour	OR	tumor
	<b>AND</b>				
<b>terms for concept 3</b> (electromagnetic emission)	“electromagnetic emission*”	OR	“electromagnetic field*”	OR	

The search rules applied in the above grid are:

**truncation symbol \*** - an asterisk at the end of a word allows you to find all the different possible endings to that word

**“quotation marks”** - to search for a phrase (i.e. two or more words in a particular order) enclose the words in double quotation marks