

Create a Search Strategy:

1. Summarise your topic

A great way to test your understanding of the assignment topics is to summarise it in your own words:

- read your assignment topic or question
- reflect on the aim of the assignment while thinking about the tasks involved
- rewrite the main concepts in a sentence or paragraph.

2. Select your Keywords

After you have summarised the topic, circle, highlight or underline the keywords and phrases that are relevant to your topic. Using the example below you might circle the following words:

Discuss the environmental impact of plastic water bottles in Australia.

3. Identify synonyms and alternative keywords

Not all of the relevant literature will use exactly the same keyword, so you will need think about possible synonyms (words that mean the same thing), alternate keywords, or words with variant spellings. If you are having trouble thinking of some alternative keywords it can sometimes help to visit an encyclopaedia or dictionary. Visit your subject guides for specialist dictionaries.

Synonyms

Using some of the keywords from our sample topic, what are some words or phrases that mean the same thing?

Discuss the environmental impact of plastic water bottles in Australia

↓	↓
pollution	packaged water
litter	water container
resource depletion	polyethlyene terephthalate
energy consumption	

Alternative words endings

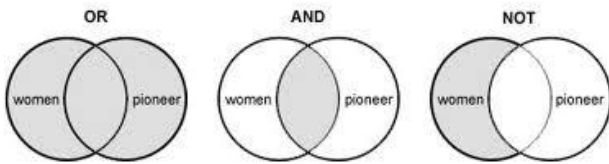
When searching on some databases, you will need to consider alternative word endings and variant spellings. For instance, if your keyword was *recycle* you might want to consider some derivatives of recycle when you conduct your search: *recycled*, *recycling*, *recyclable*.

- **Tip:** You can use the truncation feature to find all word derivatives of recycle by using an asterix, *recyc**

4. Link your keywords and phrases

Think about how you will use your key words and phrases to construct a search. For instance, you might use a combination of:

- Boolean operators — use AND, OR, NOT to combine keywords. For instance, using AND will find result both words (environmental AND impact), using OR will find either keyword (bottle OR container), and NOT will find only one of your keywords (bottle NOT container)



- phrase searching — use quotation marks to find a phrase. For instance, "environmental impact"
- proximity searching — expressed variously as w/n, near/n, n/n, or NEAR (as in *environmtal w/5 impact*).

Example searches

Using the example topic, relevant keywords, and some of the search operators discussed above, you can generate a search strategy. For instance:

"environmental impact" AND "bottled water"

environment* AND Australia AND ("bottled water" OR "plastic bottles")

5. Locating and evaluating your results

If you are not getting the right results, or are getting too many or too few results, you might need to revise your search strategy.

If you have too many results you may want to:

- add additional keywords or phrases
- limit your search results by document type, date, subject (most databases have this feature)
- conduct your search in a particular field (title or abstract fields).

If you have too few results you may want to:

- check your spelling
- remove some of the keywords
- try alternate keywords and phrases
- try alternate databases (use the [Library subject guides](#) to find relevant databases on your topic).

Source: (The library at The University of Queensland)