Constructing a Search Worksheet

Part 1. Example of search process:

Write out research question or topic.

Example: I am looking for information about programs and other resources libraries offer to support start ups.

1. Brainstorm additional terms:

   - Concept #1: support; programs; services; workshops; class; collections; resources
   - Concept #2: start ups; startups; entrepreneurs; business community
   - Concept #3: public libraries; if relevant: academic libraries, corporate libraries, special libraries

   Note that the truncation symbol (*) retrieves service or services; entrepreneurship or entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial; the quotation marks will keep public with libraries or library.

2. Initial search using some of the terms above and focusing first on public libraries:

   - Support or program* or service* or workshop* or class* or collection* or resource*
     AND
   - startups or "start ups" or entrepren* or “business community”
     AND
   - “public libraries” OR “public library”

3. Try the search in a database relevant to your research question.

   Review/skim of first set of results

   Review several subject terms listed in the search results that could be used in a second or third iteration of the search.

Additional search tips:

1. Too many or too few?

   Note that focusing only on public libraries could be too specific, and there may be useful articles about successful programs in academic or other libraries that could be applied to public libraries. You may want to consider broadening the search by removing public libraries as a term.

   Or, you can expand by trying some additional databases. One way to do this is broaden the search to include databases on the same platform – for example, using the Choose databases option (this example is from the EBSCO platform, but this is available in other platforms as well).

   Alternatively, if you get too many results, you may want to focus your search a bit. You can try adding more specific terms, or adjusting the search to make the search term more important – for example, making it a subject term or part of the title.
2. **Identifying additional search terms:** Imagine a user having a question for which you can think of few search terms, synonym, or related terms. Here are four options:

a. Do a broad search and review subject terms you see in results.

b. Use a Thesaurus – some databases offer one on the platform (see, for example, Browsing EBSCO Databases Using the Thesaurus).

c. Consider using a concept generator, for example, you could try CREDO Reference’s Mind Map.

d. Think about how your topic would be described in the following:
   - a news article
   - by researchers in a journal article
   - by members of a professional association
   - by the business community

Remember that searching is iterative and requires ongoing evaluation, reflection, and refinement!

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**Part 2: Your turn!**

1. **Add your research question or topic here:**

   ___________________________________________________________

   ___________________________________________________________

   ___________________________________________________________

2. **Write down your search using one or two sentences, including all aspects of the topic. What search terms would you use to find information about this topic?**

   1. **Identify at least one term for each aspect**

      Concepts: Your search terms:
      Concept 1 ______________________
      Concept 2 ______________________
      Concept 3 ______________________

   2. **Generate additional possible search terms for each concept.**

      Concepts: Your search terms: Synonyms/related terms: Synonyms/related terms:
      Concept 1 ______________________ ______________________ ______________________
      Concept 2 ______________________ ______________________ ______________________

Developed by Tasha Cooper and Brenna Helmstutler, 11/2017; updated 8/2018 BH
Suggestions for finding synonyms:
• Use a Thesaurus (some databases have a built in Thesaurus)
• Explore CREDO Reference Mind Map
• Think about how this topic would be described by stakeholders or others writing about the topic.

3. Try a search in a database of your choice.
   a. Review the results, and for any results that look related, identify terms you might consider as you revise your search.
   b. Add three additional subject terms to the list above.

   Concepts: Your search terms: Synonyms/related terms: Synonyms/related terms:
   Concept 1 ___________________ ___________________ ___________________ ___________________
   Concept 2 ___________________ ___________________ ___________________ ___________________
   Concept 3 ___________________ ___________________ ___________________ ___________________
   Additional concepts ___________________ ___________________ ___________________ ___________________
   as needed ___________________ ___________________ ___________________ ___________________

4. Try out your search and evaluate the results. Consider how you can improve your search, and then try a revised search. Record brief notes about any changes to your search strategy.