Information Seeking Strategies

CREATING A SEARCH STRATEGY:

- This is the process of matching your topic with the way that topic is indexed by a search engine or a database. It is largely a process of hit or miss. If you are lucky, the topic has been indexed using the terms you have thought of. **Natural language indexes** (such as indexes created for search engines) use nouns and phrases (strings: grouping of words such as "European history" or "First National Bank") extracted from the documents (web pages) themselves or the search queries people use to try to access those web pages. **Controlled language indexes** (such as for most online databases and library OPAC's) are pre-created categorizations of topics and subtopics. Searching is an iterative process: the strategy is revised as searches are performed and one gains knowledge of the topic and how the topic has been indexed.

- The first step is to think of as many ways (**synonyms**) as possible to state your topic using nouns or phrases (**strings**: the syntax for a string is to enclose the phrase in quotation marks; i.e. "communication theory").

- Try a couple of searches using those nouns or phrases, and check the results. If you are not getting good results, revise your search strategy (start excluding terms). **Searching is an iterative process.**

WEB SEARCHING (NATURAL LANGUAGE SEARCHING)

1. **Google** ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com))
   - Using **search strings**: combining keywords using quotation marks · example: "Internet crime"
   - Using **domain searching**: restrict searches to Internet domains (com, org, gov, edu, mil) using site:domain · example: "Internet crime" site:gov
   - Using **filetypes**: restrict searches to specific filetypes (pdf, doc, rtf, txt) using filetype:filetypeextension · example: "Internet crime" site:gov filetype:pdf
   - Using certain **keywords**: use keywords to generate bibliographies such as links, references, citations, bibliography · example: "Internet crime" references

2. **Using Google Scholar** ([scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com)): using "author" searches - example: author:Gibson (You can combine this with keywords; i.e. author:Gibson affordances). Google Scholar is linked to resources available at McDaniel College if accessed on campus. I usually start searches using Google Scholar because Google Scholar provides some key information such as number of citations (that you can click on to see these sources also).
USING WEB BROWSERS (such as Internet Explorer of Firefox) EFFECTIVELY WHILE SEARCHING:

A. Use Favorite Places/Bookmarks: add links to Favorite Places, organize your links using appropriately labeled folders and subfolders.
B. Use Find (in the “Edit” menu) to quickly locate specific information on a page.
C. Use Zotero: http://www.zotero.org/

FREE SEARCH SOFTWARE:

A. FirstStop WebSearch (http://www.firststopwebsearch.com/).
B. WebFerret (http://www.webferret.com/).
C. Copernic (http://www.copernic.com/).

DATABASE SEARCHING (CONTROLLED VOCABULARY SEARCHING)

1. HOOVER LIBRARY (http://hoover.mcdaniel.edu/)
   A. Library catalogue.
   B. Find articles.
   C. Specific Databases:
      a. Communication & Mass Media Complete.
      b. JSTOR
      c. Project Muse
      d. PsycARTICLES
      e. PsycINFO
      f. ScienceDirect
      g. SocINDEX Full-text
      h. Tests in Print

ENDNOTE

- A data storage program for citations and bibliographies.
- Works with MS Word to create and format citations/bibliographies automatically.

BEST SOURCES

First off, only search for the primary research literature (literature reviews, meta-analyses, and research reports). Don’t worry about all the thought/opinion pieces.

Try to find resources that compile large amounts of research into one document. Types of documents that do this include:

- Handbooks
- Literature reviews
- Meta-analyses
Creating an Information Seeking Plan

1. The first step is to choose a general topic of interest. Um, duh... 😊

2. The next step is to list as many keywords as you can think of that relate to that topic. Consider synonyms and different ways to say the same thing.
   a. Try to organize the words and phrases that you have brainstormed in a hierarchy from general to specific.
      Example: I’m interested in gaming communities and how gamers share information about games.
      
      A. Online communities, digital communities, Internet communities
      B. Gaming Communities, virtual gaming communities
      C. Gamers, mud’s, moo’s, mmorpg’s
      D. information sharing, information seeking, information swapping
      E. GameFaq’s, IGN, GameSpot

   b. Of course, right now I don’t really know that much about the topic, and so the keywords may not be the best or the most appropriate. And so, I need to go to Step 3.

3. Step three is mainly filling in the background knowledge in your head so that you can use the most appropriate keywords to find quality information. Unfortunately, this can be something of a time consuming step since you have to do quite a bit of reading and searching. However, the easiest way to go about this is to:
   a. Try to find a handbook, review, and/or meta-analysis on the most general of your keywords listed above. Search your library’s catalog. Search Amazon. Search Google Scholar.
   b. Revise your keywords based on what you have found in the sources above. Also, check the references list in these sources and note:
      1) journals where this research seems to often be published
      2) the authors who often publish in this area
      3) specific articles that seem highly relevant to what you are really interested in
   c. Try doing some searches on Google Scholar using your more specific keywords from Step 2. Check to see if these keywords are bringing up references to articles relevant to the topic you are interested in. Again, revise your keywords.

4. Basically, information seeking is an iterative process that gets easier the more familiar you are with 1) information seeking and 2) your topic of interest.

5. If you are really struggling coming up with search terms, then ask a professor for help (one who is familiar with that area) and/or ask a librarian. Librarians are trained in information seeking and are often able to work wonders.