HOW TO START YOUR ASSIGNMENT: A STEP BY STEP GUIDE

This handout covers the basics of how to construct a simple, step by step search strategy to help you to find information as quickly and efficiently as possible.

**Step 1**
Analyse topic

**Step 2**
Select the best starting point
- Identify main terms and keywords
- Use dictionaries, encyclopaedia and thesaurus to help
- Consider variant spellings
- Use or expand acronyms
- Identify synonyms
- Search the Library catalogue
- Search databases (use MultiSearch or search individual sources)
- Consult our Subject Guides
- Try subject gateways e.g. Bubl or Intute
- Search other Libraries
- Check our Weblinks
- Try search engines Google Scholar Google Books

**Step 3**
Review
- Ask Library Staff for advice
- Organise information and begin assignment!
Search Tips

- **variant spellings** - labour / labor

- **truncation** - enter the root of a search term and replace the ending with an *
  - searching for manag* will return results for management, managing, manager
  - searching for nurs* will return results for: nurse, nurses, nursing, nursery, nurseries etc.
  - searching for labo* will return results for labour, labor, labouring, laboring etc.

- **wildcard** - enter your search term and replace unknown characters with a ?
  - wom?n will return results containing the following: woman, women

- **phrase searching** - use quotes to find combined words together e.g. “Northern Ireland”

- **boolean operators** allow you to search for multiple keywords:
  - ‘AND’ links two different concepts together e.g. allergy AND child
  - ‘OR’ combines different expressions for the same concept e.g. elderly OR aged
  - ‘NOT’ removes concepts from a search term e.g. pets NOT cats
  Boolean works with truncation too e.g. (old* OR age*) AND fitness

- **synonyms** - words that have the same or nearly the same meaning e.g. teenager, youth, adolescent.

- **acronyms** - e.g. WHO is an acronym for World Health Organisation, UN is an acronym for United Nations.

**Note:**

- ✓ Use multiple Library recommended sources - no single source will cover everything but may complement each other.
- ✓ Add to keyword list – the search terminology may differ across different sources.
- ✓ When you find a suitable source, check its list of references for more relevant items.

**Evaluating Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Who?</strong></th>
<th>Who wrote it? Check qualifications and experience of author or organisation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What?</strong></td>
<td>What process was used to gather the information? Can it be verified? Are images authentic? Are sources listed in a bibliography?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When?</strong></td>
<td>When was it published? Is it up-to-date? Is date important for this assignment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why?</strong></td>
<td>Why was this information published? What is its purpose? Has some information being excluded? Is it biased?</td>
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</tbody>
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