Part 1: Database Search Tips

Library databases are not very 'intelligent'. They search the exact words you give them, and don't usually substitute synonyms. Here are some tips to help you search them more effectively.

1. **Single words or short phrases** work best as search words. If you type in a long sentence, the database will search for the words in exactly that order and you will probably get no results.

E.g. instead of "smartphone market in Canada", try **smartphones and Canada**

Photo by Dylan Parker:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/antidigerati/1375118941/

2. **Try different combinations of search words to vary your results** – before you start searching, think of possible search words and synonyms. You will also get ideas for other search words as you are searching in the databases.

E.g.: chocolate, candy, confectionery, snacks, "snack foods", sweets

Photo by Siona Watson:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/26149290@N02/3871516012/

3. **How to combine search words:**

   a) Use quotation marks to search for a phrase **e.g. "wind energy"**

   b) Use **AND** between words to find results with all search words in (this narrows your results)
   E.g. "wind energy" and "British Columbia"

   c) Use **OR** between words and phrases with similar meaning
   E.g. "wind power" or "wind energy" or "alternative energy"

Photo by warrenski:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/warrenski/2529220364/

4. **Truncation**: use the asterisk symbol * to search for variant endings of a word (including singular and plural). This works well with article databases.

E.g. entrepreneur* (will find entrepreneur, entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial)

5. **Precision:** in article databases such as *Business Source Complete*, use the drop down boxes to the right of the search box to make your search more precise by specifying where you want your search words to appear (e.g. in the full text of the article, or in the article summary)

Part 2: Research Tips

To avoid hours of frustration searching the databases, it's important to apply critical thinking to your research. Consider alternative strategies if you can't find the exact information you are looking for.

Research Tip - Language

- Find the terminology used for your product or service
- Think of synonyms (words or phrases with the same or very similar meaning)
- Rephrase your search often to get different search results

Takeaway:
The use of words and language is crucial to searching success

E.g:
"online learning"
elearning
e-learning
"distance learning"
"distributed learning"
"remote learning"
"online education"
gaming
simulation
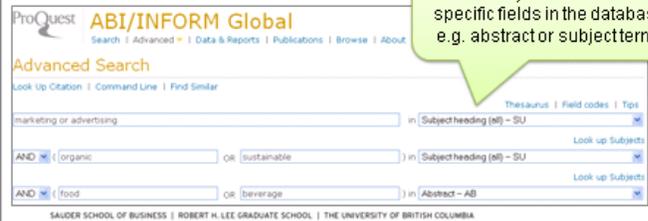"learning technologies"
"learning 2.0"

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Research Tip - Precision

- Add or change a search word if you get too many irrelevant results
- Remove or change a word if you get too few results

Takeaway:
Experiment to narrow or widen your search

Consider using the dropdown lists to limit your search words to specific fields in the database, e.g. abstract or subject terms

ProQuest ABI/INFORM Global
Search | Advanced ▾ | Data & Reports | Publications | Browse | About
Advanced Search
Look Up Citation | Command Line | Find Similar

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Research Tip – Does it exist?

- Can this data be collected?
- Who would collect this data?
- Where might this data be published?

Takeaway:
If no one collects the data you need, or it is not freely published on the web or available through library resources (such as database), you will not be able to find it.

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Research Tip - Substitute

"I need to find out how many 12-18 year olds live in Vancouver, but the census only shows data for 10-14 or 15-19 year olds. Where can I find the data I need?"

Takeaway:
Data may not be collected in exactly the way you want it. Data categories can vary depending on how it is collected and who collects it. You may need to substitute with the data you _can_ find.

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Research Tip - Extrapolate

"Where can I find the number of cruise ship passengers who shop for clothing in Yaletown."

Takeaway:
This is very specific data. If you're searching for secondary data at a very granular or micro level, you may have to move up to a broader category. E.g. researching tourist spending in Vancouver, or the BC the cruise ship industry

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Research Tip – Market Research Reports

Q. "I found a market research report on the Internet. How can I access it through the library?"

Takeaway:
The library subscribes to several databases containing market research reports, but the individual reports available on the Internet are very expensive, so libraries are not able to provide access. Search for alternatives in the market research databases we do provide access to. Consider reports on similar or broader markets.

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