

When you need to find information, you should take time to plan your search and develop a strategy. Follow the **SKILL Planning Strategy** to plan your search:

- | | | |
|---------|----------|---|
| Step 1: | S | ummarise your topic in one or two sentences |
| Step 2: | K | eywords and phrases need to be highlighted |
| Step 3: | I | dentify synonyms, alternate terms, phrases and variant spelling |
| Step 4: | L | ink your keywords and phrases |
| Step 5: | L | ocate your Information |

■ STEP 1: Summarise Your Topic.

What specific information do you need?

Think about what **specific** information you need. It is helpful, at this stage, to summarise your research topic in one or two sentences. For example, instead of saying you want to do an assignment or paper on “genetics” or “the gold rushes” or “urban planning”, which are very broad topics, you could state your specific information need as:

- “I am interested in the scientific and ethical issues of reproduction research, specifically those related to human cloning”
- *or*
- “I want to investigate the effect of the gold rushes on population during the 1850s and 1860s.”
- *or*
- “I want to find information about urban planning for sustainable environments. “

Questions to assist you with your summary:

Answers to the following questions will assist you to formulate your research summary:

- ◆ What is the **main idea** of my research topic?
- ◆ What **specific ideas** am I trying to describe or prove?
- ◆ What **coverage** am I interested in: international or a specific geographical region?
- ◆ What **types** of information am I interested in, eg. Statistics, patents, journal articles or conference proceedings?
- ◆ What is the currency of the information I require: the last 5 years or further back to the last 20 years or more?

When you have summarised your research topic, record it on the **SKILL Search Strategy Planner** included at the end of this guide.

For example:

SKILL SEARCH STRATEGY PLANNER
STEP 1: Summarise your topic below
I want to find information about urban planning and sustainable environments.

Figure 1: Example of Step 1: SKILL Search Strategy Planner

You may find some resources by searching on “**urban planning**” and “**sustainable environments**”. However, by following the steps outlined below, you can improve the quality of your search results and sometimes the quantity.

■ STEP 2. Keywords and Phrases should be highlighted

Identify and **highlight** the main keywords and phrases in your summary. This will break down your sentences into keywords and phrases (or ideas).

When you have identified your keywords and phrases, record them on your **SKILL Search Strategy Planner**.

For example:

I want to find information on urban planning and sustainable environments.

Step 2: Record the keywords and phrases		
Phrase	Keyword	Keyword
Urban planning	sustainable	environments

Figure 2: Example of Step 2: SKILL Search Strategy Planner

■ STEP 3. Identify Synonyms & Alternate Keywords

Create a list of synonyms, alternate keywords and other phrases (don't forget words with variant spelling eg. paediatric or pediatric, encyclopaedia or encyclopedia) that describe the keywords and phrases you have underlined.

TIP:

1. The **thesaurus** or list of subject headings on the database you are using will assist you.

Note: Not all databases have a thesaurus. You can find out information about the use of a thesaurus and if the database provides one from the database Help menu.

2. Use **wildcards** (*, #, ?, !) to truncate keywords to retrieve plural and other variant forms. eg: *communicat** will retrieve *communicate, communicates, communicated, communicating and communication*.

Consult the database's **Online Help** to find the correct wildcard to use.

These keywords and phrases will form the basic units of your search strategy. As you progress through the search process, your knowledge of the topic will increase and your list of keywords and phrases will grow and/or be refined. Record your results in your **SKILL Search Strategy Planner**.

For example:

STEP 3: Record other synonyms, alternate keywords and phrases				
Key words from Step 2.	<u>urban planning</u>	<u>sustainable</u>	<u>environments</u>	<u>planning</u>
OR	town	ecolog*	habitat*	architect*
OR	regional	energy	locale	build*
OR	city	viable	neighbourhood	design

Figure 3: Example of Step 3: SKILL Search Strategy Planner

NOTE: The wildcard used in the example above is the * asterisk.

Some databases use " " inverted commas around the words to indicate a phrase search.

■ STEP 4. Link Keywords & Phrases using Connectors and Parentheses

Combine your keywords & phrases into a search strategy

Use the **Connectors** – **AND**, **OR**, **NOT** and **Parentheses ()** – to combine your keywords and phrases into sets and then your sets into a search strategy. If you find you have too many keywords, use the additional ones to **modify** your search strategy after your initial search.

NOTE: Connectors are sometimes referred to as *Operators* or *Boolean Operators* or *Boolean Connectors*.

Follow the steps below:

1. Create sets by combining your synonyms with the **OR** connector;
2. Enclose each set of synonyms with parentheses ();
3. Combine the sets with either the **AND** or the **NOT** connector;

NOTE: Some databases allow phrases to be enclosed with “ ” inverted commas (see the individual database Help function for more information). Do not forget the * wildcards

Record your results on your **SKILL Search Strategy Planner**.

For example:

STEP 4: Use the Connectors to combine your keywords & phrases

- Create sets by combining your synonyms with the **OR** connector
- Enclose each set with parentheses
- Check the results for each set and then combine the sets with the **AND** connector. Use the **NOT** connector sparingly! **See the “Searching Tips & Tricks” Uselt for more information.**

Examples of searches using your keywords & phrases.

Set 1. (“urban planning” **OR** town **OR** regional **OR** city)

Set 2. (sustainable **OR** ecolog* **OR** energy **OR** viable)

Set 3. (environments **OR** habitat* **OR** locale **OR** neighbourhood)

Set 4. (planning **OR** architect* **OR** build* **OR** design)

Set 5. Example: Set 1 **AND** Set 3

Set 6 Example: Set 1 **AND** Set 2

Continue with combining sets until you are sure you have covered all keywords and phrases.

Figure 4: Example of Step 4: SKILL Search Strategy Planner

■ STEP 5. Locate the Information by Conducting the Search

How do you enter your search strategy into the database to get the best results?

Using the **SKILL Search Strategy Planner**, you may find that you generate a number of sets of keywords and phrases (similar to Figure 4 above). If this is the case, you may be able to use a building block approach (similar to Fig.4 above) to enter your search strategy into your selected database.

TIP:

Need more information about the **connectors** or using **parentheses** or taking your searching skills further? Read the *Uselt, Searching Tips and Tricks*.

SKILL SEARCH STRATEGY PLANNER

STEP 1: Summarise your topic below

STEP 2: Key words and phrases need to be underlined

Key Word/Phrase 1:

Key Word/Phrase 2:

Key Word/Phrase 3:

STEP 3: Identify other phrases, synonyms and variant words

OR

OR

OR

OR

OR

OR

OR

OR

OR

STEP 4: Combine your keywords and phrases.

- Broaden the search by combining terms using **OR**
- Combine keywords with **AND** to narrow the search
- Further narrow the search, if necessary, by joining the terms with the **NOT** or **AND NOT** connector. Use the **NOT** connector sparingly!

NOTE: Some databases allow phrases to be enclosed with “ ” inverted commas (see the individual database Help function for more information). Do not forget the * wildcards

Keyword/Phrase	Connectors – AND/OR/NOT	Keyword/Phrase

TIP: If you need to learn more about Connectors, see the “Searching Tips & Tricks” Uselt for more information.

STEP 5: Locate the Information

Build your search step by step by entering your sets one at a time into the database’s text box. Review the results after each step allowing them to guide your progress.



Ask UQL Cyberschool

<http://www.library.uq.edu.au/schools/cyberschool@library.uq.edu.au>