DEVELOPING YOUR SEARCH

Objectives  To explore different ways of broadening your search.

Comments  Learning a few simple search techniques can help save you a lot of time.

THINK

When carrying out your searches, look at the number of results you retrieve. It isn't possible to give an ‘optimum’ number of records for which you should aim: an exhaustive literature search for a doctoral thesis will be quite different in scope to a few quick hits to update you on a topic, for example.

However, you don’t want to waste time ploughing through dozens of irrelevant results, so do read on for some simple but effective techniques for developing your search.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

It’s often better to start a search broadly, and then gradually narrow it down. If you start off with a very specialised search, you may miss out on useful hits which don’t quite match your search terms.

You won’t find everything you need with just one search, so be prepared to spend some time refining and developing it. As you look through your results, you should get useful pointers for alternative keywords, and be alerted to any ambiguities in your search terms.

Even if you can search a particular resource via LibrarySearch, you may find that doing a separate search on the resource itself will give you more sophisticated options (especially if you use the advanced search).
Can’t find enough?

- Search a less specialised resource
- Use different search terms
- Combine terms with ‘OR’
- Truncate your search terms

All our e-resources have different scope and coverage. Check the listing on the Library Guide to see if there is a more suitable resource for your requirements.

Look at the keywords and subject headings in your search results to get ideas for alternative search terms.

- Truncate your search term to find variants (e.g. * will find culture, cultures, cultural etc).

For example, * OR Soviet Union retrieves records containing either of those search terms.

Check to see if there are alternative spellings for your search term (particularly if it is a non-English word or person).

NB be careful of ‘over truncation’ (e.g. * will find compost as well as composer!).