Developing search strategies

Step 1: Analyse your assignment question to locate key concepts

Sample question: ‘Geek culture’ has been embraced by the mainstream with a deluge of genre TV and superhero movies and an increased awareness of conventions, cosplay and more. Examine whether this ‘mainstreaming’ of fandom broadens or marginalises subculture identities.

The key concepts here are geek culture, mainstream and identity.

Step 2: Identify synonyms and related words

Why do this? Sometimes the assignment questions don’t include the best search words, so we need to think of synonyms or related terms to help find the best resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key concept</th>
<th>Synonyms or related words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>geek culture</td>
<td>fandom ; subculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainstream</td>
<td>popular culture ; mass culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identity</td>
<td>individuality ; sense of self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We might not need all of these words, but thinking about your search can save you time and effort.

Step 3: Search smarter using these tips

Tip 1 | Use AND to connect different concepts and therefore get fewer search results, e.g. identity AND geek culture AND mainstream

Tip 2 | Use OR to connect synonyms and related terms and therefore get more search results, e.g. mainstream OR popular culture

Tip 3 | Use quotation marks (" ") to search for a phrase (keep the words together), e.g. "geek culture" ; "popular culture"

Tip 4 | Use truncation (*) to search for different variations of the word ending, e.g. identi* = identity, identities, identification, ... ; fan* = fan, fans, fan's, fandom, ...

Step 4: Creating the final search

Here is a potential search that we could use for our question. The brackets help to keep the search terms together correctly.

("geek culture" OR fan*)
AND
(mainstream* OR "popular culture")
AND
(identi* OR individuality)

Need further assistance?

Ask the Library: newcastle.edu.au/library/help-and-information