Introduction

Welcome to our video on building strong searches. Whether you're writing a paper, working on a project, or learning something new, finding useful information is essential. While basic searches can be helpful, improving them can make the process more productive, allowing you to find the most relevant sources for your research. Today, we will explore why strong searches are helpful and share how to build them.

Why is a Strong Search Helpful?

Let's now explore why strong searches are helpful. There are many reasons to strengthen your search, but two main benefits are precision and efficiency.

Strong searches help with precision by excluding irrelevant sources and focusing only on ones that directly relate to your research topic or question.

This also boosts efficiency since you can find useful sources faster, without having to sift through unrelated ones.

Overall, strong searches can help you find effective sources in less time.

How to Build a Strong Search

Now that we've covered why a strong search is helpful, let's dive into how to build one! Keywords, search operators, and logical structure are the main elements of a strong search! We will look at these in more detail, then use examples to help you understand everything clearly.

First, start by brainstorming keywords based on the main ideas and key concepts of your research. Once you have your keywords, that are relevant to your research, you can move forward with building a strong search.

The next step is to include search operators. These are special terms and functions that help improve your search. Boolean search operators are the main ones to focus on, as they let you specify how the search tool should use your keywords. Phrase searching and truncation are also useful when needed.

Relevant keywords and search operators are the key components of a strong search. If you need more help with these, remember that we have other videos and guides available to assist you.

The final aspect is logically structuring the search. This is the step where you look over the search you made. Check if the operators are used correctly, and that everything aligns with your research needs. Complex searches with many operators and keywords can get messy. For those, use parentheses (also known as brackets) to organize and tidy it all up. This helps to ensure the search is structured and clear.

Overall, these are the main elements that transform a basic search into a strong one!

Building a Strong Search: Using Advanced Search
So, how does this look in action? Now, we will apply what we've learned by turning an example research question into a strong, focused search.

Use an advanced search to get started, which you can find on most databases and search engines. Advanced search makes it much easier to organize and build a strong search.

Key Concepts
First, examine the research question. Look for the key concepts behind it. These are the main ideas that you want to know about. Separate the key concepts into different search boxes. Set it up so it is one concept per box. Usually, you will need 3 boxes, but you can use less or add more if needed.

Keywords and Boolean Search Operators
After separating the key concepts, brainstorm additional keywords. These can be synonyms, acronyms, or related terms. For example, some authors might use "business," while others use "company." Both are relevant for the research question, so lets include both.

This is when you can use Boolean operators. For keywords about the same concept, use the operator "OR." To connect the different search boxes, use the operator "AND," You can do this easily with the drop-down menu on the left.

Truncation
This is usually enough for a strong search but using a few additional operators can make it even better.
In our last search box, all the terms started with the word "ethic." Instead of typing out each variation, we can simply add an asterisk after "ethic." This technique is called truncation. It helps save time and effort by telling the search engine to find all words that begin with that root—like "ethics," "ethical," and "ethically"—without having to type each one individually.

Phrase Search
In the middle search box, we have a term that is actually two words. Leaving it like this can be an issue when searching. Sometimes, the search will use the words separately. This can accidentally change the meaning behind your search, giving you less relevant results. So, when there are terms that use with more than one word, like in artificial intelligence, use phrase search. This just means to add double quotation marks around the term. This will keep the words together in the right order.

We've now built a strong search that has all the essentials!

Search String

If you prefer, you can also build the search in 1 line. Instead of multiple search boxes for each key concept, use parentheses for the same effect. Now, use Boolean operators as normal to connect key concepts and keywords. Then, add more operators as needed. That's all you need for a 1-line strong search!

Conclusion

A strong search helps a lot when researching, and you can always adjust it as you go, so it does not need to be perfect. If you need further help, feel free to contact us!

Run Time: 5:07

License : CC BY NC ND 4.0

Created with Canva – templates and visual elements provided by Canva

Music: "Echo Bay" by Clipchamp

Research & Instruction Services

University of Niagara Falls Canada