

Quick Search Tips

These tips are general rules-of-thumb to keep in mind while you are researching. They will work with many databases and internet search engines, but not all.

- **Phrase searching** – Use quotation marks to search for an exact phrase or to keep multiple terms together. Example: “teaching English as a second language”
- **AND** – Use AND to join together multiple terms. Generally, the more terms you enter, the fewer and more relevant your results will be. Example: “elementary education” AND mathematics AND “teaching methods”
- **Advanced search** – Most databases and search engines have an advanced search screen which will offer different ways to limit your search. Your only challenge: find it and use it!
- **Change your terms!** – If you are not finding what you want, try using different terms. Example: Try using “internet marketing” instead of “e-commerce,” or “assessment” instead of “evaluation.”

Many databases will allow you to choose different kinds of searches. Here is a list of commonly used (and misused) search options and what they do.

Database Search Field	What Does it Do?
Keyword	The database will search for words and phrases in multiple fields, usually the title, subject headings, and sometimes the full text. Used alone, this is a very broad search that may pull more results than you have time for. Use multiple keywords, or use it in addition to another field for best results.
Title	The database will search for words and phrases in the title of an article/book. If your search terms are in the title, there is a greater chance of finding relevant material.
Subject	Most databases assign subject headings to articles/books in their system. Find the thesaurus link (if available) and type in your topic to see what subject headings the database uses for that topic. For example, if you type “techniques” into a database thesaurus, you might find that the database only recognizes the term “methods” as a subject. With a subject search, the articles/books in your results should all be on the subject you chose.
ISSN	Each journal has its own unique identifying number (ISSN). This is useful when searching for articles in a specific journal. Use it in conjunction with another search field for best results.