Planning and refining your search

Basic points to start discussion

# Pause to consider what it is you are really looking for

Think about the question you are trying to answer rather than simply searching for the first words that come to mind.

Go back to any background materials you have for guidance.

You may be interested in the topic “Activities to improve the engagement of international students” but, for example, think about whether you are:

* Looking for material in a particular context e.g. higher education
* Interested in a particular country or geographical region
* Interested in material from a particular timeframe e.g. from 2015 onwards, the last 25 years

# Choose the right keywords

Subtract the redundant words from a question (e.g. conjunctions and prepositions):

Activities to improve the engagement of international students

**Activities** ~~to~~ **improve** ~~the~~ **engagement** ~~of~~ **international students**

Look back through any background materials to find any relevant keywords you may have forgotten.

# Think about broadening or narrowing your search

If you are getting very few hits for your search, consider broadening it out. If you are getting a lot of hits but they are irrelevant, consider narrowing your search down.

## Broadening

### Use synonyms

Use alternative words or phrases that mean the same/similar as your keywords.

E.g. **overseas students** instead of **international students**

*or*

**participation** instead of **engagement**

### Taking keywords away

The fewer keywords your search has, the more general it is and thus the more articles it is likely to find.

~~Activities to improve the~~ **engagement** ~~of~~ **international students**

### Using **OR**

Using OR (in capitals) to join keywords means you search for articles that have either or both terms.

E.g. **engagement OR participation**

This will findarticles that contain eitheror both the words **engagement** and **participation**

*Whereas***:**

**engagement participation**

This will onlyfindarticles that contain both the words **engagement** and **participation**

## Narrowing

### Phrase searching

Putting words in quote marks means that databases look for those words as specified i.e. in the same order and next to each other

**Activities** ~~to~~ **improve** ~~the~~ **engagement** ~~of “~~**international students”**

You should only get hits that contain your exact phrase rather than any that contain the individual words.

### Adding more keywords

The more keywords your search has, the more specific it is and thus the fewer articles it is likely to find.

**Activities** ~~to~~ **improve** ~~the~~ **engagement** ~~of~~ **international students**

**UK “higher education”**

# *Please note*

*These techniques can give different results in different databases.*