Building a Search Strategy
A Step-by-Step Guide

STEP ONE
To begin, write the research question or topic in one or two sentences. Then, circle the main concepts. For example:

How does divorce influence the psychosocial development of children?

STEP TWO
The next step is to find keywords that describe the main concepts in the research topic. To do this, write down synonyms and related terms. For example:

1) Divorce
   • Separation
   • Family relationships
   • Parents

2) Psychosocial development
   • Developmental psychology
   • Social behavior
   • Child psychology

3) Children
   • Child
   • Childhood
   • Youth

Helpful Tip!
Use a dictionary, thesaurus, or specialized encyclopedia a library database (such as Credo Reference or Canadian Reference Centre)

Fill in the chart below using your research topic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main research concepts</th>
<th>Synonyms and related terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**STEP THREE**

Use connectors (AND, OR and NOT) and truncation (*) to put the keywords together in a “search statement.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>How do I use it?</th>
<th>For example:</th>
<th>Use it with your research topic:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AND</td>
<td>Use AND to connect keywords and <strong>limit</strong> search results to resources with both terms</td>
<td>developmental psychology AND divorce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Use OR to connect synonyms and <strong>expand</strong> search results to include similar terms and topics</td>
<td>child OR youth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT</td>
<td>Use NOT to <strong>remove</strong> an irrelevant term or topic from search results</td>
<td>family relationships NOT siblings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>Use truncation to find variant forms of a term, such as the plural or adjectival form, by removing the ending and replacing it with an asterisk (*)</td>
<td>child* OR youth* (will find children, youths, youthful, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STEP FOUR**

Try one or more of the search statements in the online library catalogue. Go to the main page of the library website and use the search box at the top.

Click on “Advanced Search” to open a new search page:

Type a single keyword or one search statement into each search box:

**STEP FIVE**

Evaluate the search results. Are they relevant? Are there too many or not enough results? If you are not finding the information you need, try one of these strategies:

- Add or remove keywords
- Browse the search results for more technical terms to use as keywords
- Choose a field from the drop-down menu next to the search box
- Change the connector between the keywords
- Ask the librarian or a library assistant at the front desk for help!