GCU Library: Ask & Learn

Keywords

Before you start searching for information, take some time to go beyond the wording of your question and think about alternative keywords or phrases to include in your search. This will widen the scope of your search and means you will find information you might otherwise miss.

Divide your question into key concepts

Most questions will involve several elements which will need to be considered separately. This will bring better results than searching using your whole question. For example, take this question:

How will advances in robotics impact the workforce?

The two main concepts here are **robotics** and **workforce** – these are your starting point for identifying keywords. Discard smaller, less relevant words like the and in.

Identify alternative keywords and phrases

- Synonyms and related terms – vehicle or automobile for car
- Alternative spellings – colour or color
- Abbreviations and acronyms – NHS, BBC

If we return to our question, we can identify a number of alternative terms for both concepts.

Robotics	Workforce
Automation	Jobs
Artificial Intelligence (Abbreviation: AI)	Employees
Machine learning	Employment
Robots	Labour (Alternative spelling: Labor)

Below you'll find a template to help you think about your own keywords.

Step one: Divide your question into key concepts

	Key Concept
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Step two: For each of the key concepts above, think of possible keyword variations

	Keyword 1	Keyword 2	Keyword 3	Keyword 4
Concept 1.		OR	OR	OR
Concept 2.		OR	OR	OR
Concept 3.		OR	OR	OR
Concept 4.		OR	OR	OR

Next steps: Bring it all together

Now that you have identified your keywords, there are some helpful techniques you can use to join them together and make your search work more effectively. To find out more, look at our Search Skills Guide.

If you need help, get in touch with the library. For more information, visit our Appointments, drop-ins and enquiries page.