

Module 2.5 Putting a Search Together

Searching a database may seem daunting at first or extremely easy depending on your perspective and approach. Different information needs require different tools, and each tool has subtle differences. There are some consistencies you can expect from databases and there are plenty of strategies to make your searches more effective.

For example if you are searching for information on artificial intelligence (AI) ask yourself what, exactly, you want to find out about AI. Are you looking at the development of AI, biases in AI, utilization of AI in marketing? Narrowing down your topic at this stage will help to focus your search. Not only will you have keywords to work with but you can then expand your options by identifying synonyms for your keywords. A thesaurus in the database or an online thesaurus could be useful.

Databases use *controlled vocabulary* which is a formal way of describing things. For example, you may type in the phrase “heart attack” but the database uses the more formal term “myocardial infarction” instead. Start with a search for your phrase or keyword and see what you find. If a formal term/phrase shows up in a title or in the subject headings, include it in your search and see how that changes your results.

Once you have a few keywords, and you’ve figured out what focus you want to start with, you can combine keywords.

When you have related terms or synonyms, you can use OR to link those terms. For example, a search for AI might only retrieve items using the acronym. If you search for AI OR “artificial intelligence,” you’ll get results for both the full name and the acronym. Also, artificial intelligence needs to be searched as a phrase, so put it in quotation marks.

If you want to focus your search and add another keyword - or more than one- you can use an AND. AI AND marketing will find results where both terms appear, so a smaller set of more specific results. Since we would want to make sure we didn’t exclude relevant results, we should include “artificial intelligence”, like this:

(AI OR “artificial intelligence”) AND cause

The brackets around AI OR “artificial intelligence” treats those concepts as one unit to be combined with the focused keyword ‘marketing’. So now we get AI AND marketing, “artificial intelligence” AND marketing, both and marketing. If you wanted to make sure you had cause singular and plural, you can truncate cause by removing the suffix and replacing it with an asterisk. Market* will find: market, markets, marketing, marketization, and so on...