Brainstorming for Keywords and Search Strategies

Once you’ve selected your topic, the next step is to create a list of keywords that can be used to search the library catalog, databases and/or the Web to find information on your topic.

1. Take words directly from your topic. Write them on the first line of the chart.
   - What are the most important words in your research statement or question?
2. Think of synonyms for your keywords.
   - You can never know for certain what words an author may use in an article or a book to refer to a certain topic
   - Sample research question: Do tobacco advertisements encourage teens to start smoking?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tobacco</th>
<th>advertisements</th>
<th>teens</th>
<th>smoking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cigarettes</td>
<td>ads</td>
<td>teen* = teens, teenagers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>billboards</td>
<td>adolescents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commercials</td>
<td>youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Now put it all together into Search Strings using phrase searching, truncation and Boolean Operators.

- tobacco advertisements teen* smoking
- cigarette* ads teen* smoking
- “teen smoking” AND (ads OR advertising OR commercials)
- teen* AND (smoking OR cigarettes) AND (commercials OR ads)
- Etc. – add various combinations

Which one works best?

Now, it’s your turn:

Your research question or topic: _____________________________________________

- Underline your keywords and then write them on the first line of the chart below.
- Then write any synonyms underneath the keywords in the chart (Use various search strategies noted above.)

Your search strings: Remember to rank the keywords – putting the most important word(s) first] and use the various search strategies: phrase searching (“ ”), truncation (*) and Boolean Operators (AND, OR, NOT).

List any relevant subject heading that you discover when searching in EBSCO, SIRS, SRC, etc.