Searching

If you want to find information on the internet, or in an online journal database you will need to use a search tool, such as a search engine, or the search function in a database.

Sometimes search tools can be difficult to use. The following tips and tricks will make searching a whole lot easier and will help you find the information you need.
Tip 1. Choose your keywords carefully.

A search engine will *only look* for the words you type in, so you need to make sure that you are using the best words possible to describe the information you need.

Analyse your assignment question, and only type the *most important* words or phrases into the search engine.

Remember, you don’t need to type in your whole assignment question – in fact this can often work against you and make it harder for you to find relevant results.

Be specific, and try a variety of different keywords.

For more information on choosing your keywords see our *Information Skills Tutorial* on *Planning your research*. 
Tip 2. Combine your keywords with Boolean operators

Combining your keywords makes it easier to find relevant results.

There are three boolean operators you can use to combine your keywords.

They are:

AND
OR
NOT
Boolean Operator - AND

Use **AND** to find results that contain all of your keywords.

For example: if I search for **cats AND dogs**, my search will only retrieve results that include both of these words. If an article is only about **cats** it will be excluded from my results list.
Boolean Operator - AND

Entering an **AND** search can vary depending on the search engine.

If the search engine only provides you with one search box, you will need to type AND between your keywords like this:

![Search example with one box](image1.png)

If the search engine provides you with more than one search box, choose AND from the drop down list between the boxes, like this:

![Search example with multiple boxes](image2.png)
Boolean Operator - AND

If the search engine provides descriptions next to each search box, enter your keywords in the search box labelled – **find all of these words**, or something similar, like this:

Find web pages that have...
- all these words: 
  - dogs
  - cats

Or choose **all of these words** from a list of options, like this:

- Find all my search terms
- Find any of my search terms
- SmartText Searching
  - Hint
Boolean operator - OR

Use the Boolean operator OR to find results that include *at least one* of your keywords.

For example if I search for **Climate Change OR Global Warming**, my search will retrieve results that include at least one of these keywords, but not necessarily both.

This broadens my search and gives me more results than if I just searched for climate change.
Boolean operator - OR

Entering an OR search can vary depending on the search engine.

With one search box you would enter it like this:

Find: global warming or climate change

With more than one search box choose OR from the drop down list, like this:

- global warming
- Or
- climate change

If the search engine provides descriptions next to each search box, enter your keywords in the box labelled find one or more of these words, like this:

one or more of these words: global warming OR climate change
Boolean operator - NOT

Use the Boolean operator NOT to exclude unwanted keywords.

For example if I search for **wine making NOT Red wine**, my search will retrieve results that include the phrase **wine making**, but *do not* include the phrase **red wine**.

Choosing NOT limits your search by excluding unwanted aspects of a topic.
Boolean operator - NOT

Entering a NOT search can vary depending on the search engine.

With one search box you would enter it like this:

```
Find: wine making not red wine
```

With more than one search box choose NOT from the drop down list, like this:

```
Find:

wine making

Not red wine
```

If the search engine provides descriptions next to each search box, enter the keyword you want to exclude in the box labelled *don’t show these unwanted words*, like this:

**But don’t show pages that have...**

any of these unwanted words: red wine
Tip 3. Try phrase searching

If you are searching for a particular phrase, for example:

**Diabetes ulcer management** or  
**Child protection**

Try enclosing your phrase in quotation marks, like this:  
“*child protection*”

This will tell the database to only retrieve results that include your keywords next to each other exactly as you’ve entered them.
Tip 4. Use truncation

You can use truncation to search for variations in word endings.

For example if I wanted to search for the words *child*, *children* and *childhood*, I can type the word *child* into my search engine, followed by a truncation symbol, and find all of these variations.

Different search tools use different truncation symbols, so it’s important to check the help files to make sure you are using the right symbol. Some common truncation symbols include :, *, $.

Have a look at another example:

*comput* would find
  *computer* *computers* *computing*
Tip 5. Use Wildcards

You can use Wildcard symbols to search for variations in spelling.

For example, if I wanted to search for articles containing the Australian spelling of behaviour, as well as the U.S. spelling of behavior I would type behaviour into the search box, replacing the letters that vary with a wildcard symbol, like this:

*Behavi?r*

I can also use wild cards to find variations of a word. For example if I search for:

* wom?n *

My results will include records containing either woman or women.
Tip 6. Limit your search

Many search tools allow you to limit your search. Limiting your search lets you weed out unwanted search results, making it easier to find relevant information.

To limit your search go to the Advanced Search page of the database or Internet search engine you’re using and choose a limiter from the list.

Options may vary but you can often limit by:
• Publication date
• Document or Media type (e.g. to journal articles, videos, images etc)
• File type (if searching the internet)
• Place of publication/Region
• Language

Sometimes you can also limit by subject, to peer-reviewed articles, or to a particular publication.
Tip 7. Check out the help files

Most online databases and search engines have help files. These are a great place to start if you are having trouble using a particular search tool, or if you want to find additional search tips.

It’s important to remember that each search tool works a little differently, and what works in Google may not work in an online database.

To find the help files, look for links labelled help or search tips.

You can find Google’s help files by clicking on the About Google link.
Getting help…

If you are struggling to find relevant information on a topic you can contact your local TAFE Library for more advice and assistance.

You can also view the other tutorials in the Information Skills series.