

# Using Keywords Effectively

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## Introduction

When you're searching for articles or books, good keywords give you much better search results. In this video we'll show some tips for finding good keywords, and on using them effectively to improve your results.

## Finding Concepts & Keywords

Before you search, take a minute to break down your topic into its main concepts. For example, if we are trying to find out what influences nannies' decisions to immigrate to Canada, the main concepts are nannies, immigration, and Canada.

Make sure you include all the main concepts in your search, or your results won't be related to your topic.

Next, try to think of other words that could be used to talk about those concepts. In our example, I had trouble coming up with another word for nanny. Someone might refer to immigrants though rather than immigration, or Canadian rather than Canada. We'll want to make sure we include those alternate keywords in our search.

## Using Keywords to Get Better Results

Let's search in a Proquest database using our concepts and alternate keywords to see how it works:

1. In the first search box I'll type in nannies. In the search box on the next row, I'll type in immigrant. In the search box beside it, separated by OR, I'll type in its alternate keyword immigration.
2. Next, I need to add another row for my third concept, so I click on the Add a Row link. Then, I can type Canada in the search box in my new row, and type Canadian in the search box beside it, separated by OR.
3. Finally, next to Limit to:, I check the box next to Peer reviewed. This will ensure all my results are scholarly.

I get 7 results, which isn't many. When this happens, it is helpful to look at your results for clues about other keywords you may have missed. There might be other terms you can use as better alternate keywords for your concepts. You can look quickly through the results, but the most useful way is to look at the subjects.

To find the subjects, look in the left menu under Narrow Results By, and click on Subject. You'll see a few of the subject terms used for the articles in your results. To see more of them, click on More options.

A window will pop up with a lot of subjects. You can scroll through these for ideas about other keywords to use. For example, I found that another word for nannies is domestics or domestic workers. Another commonly used word for immigration is migration.

Now I can go back and change my search to include these alternate terms. This time I'll type nannies OR domestics in the first search box. Then I'll type immigration OR migration in the second row of search boxes, and Canada OR Canadian in the third row. Again, I'll limit to Peer reviewed articles.

This time I get 61 results, which is a lot better than the 7 I got the first time.

Your search results do depend on how good your keywords are. Looking in your results for clues about alternate keywords, then using them in your search, is a good way to improve your results when you aren't finding a lot.

## **Using Keywords in Other Library Databases**

Most of the Library's other databases work the same way. For example:

- In Ebsco databases you type the OR in between synonyms and put different concepts on different lines, just like in Proquest.
- In the Primo Library catalogue, you can use Advanced Search to do the same thing.

## **Questions**

If you have any questions, ask us at [library.wlu.ca/help/askus](http://library.wlu.ca/help/askus).