CREATING A SEARCH STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

When searching for regular information, we're used to just typing something into Google and getting quick results. When searching for scholarly information for your assignments though, the process is more complex and takes more time and effort.

It helps a lot if you have a plan before you start. In this video we'll look at how to create a good one.

A search strategy involves thinking about 3 things: what you need to search for, where you will search, and how you will search for it.

WHAT YOU NEED TO SEARCH FOR

To decide what you need to search for, you need a good understanding of your topic.

Its important to have a clear, focused topic to make your search easier. Try to make your topic as specific as possible. Often, its hard to find sources on a general topic, but easier for a more specific one. For example, instead of searching for difficulties finding a job, search for difficulties finding a job for new university graduates.

Sometimes you won't know enough about a topic to pick a specific aspect of it. If that's the case, you do a quick search on your general topic first and see what you find. Look through the results to see what people write about, so you can get ideas about what aspect of the topic you could focus on.

Once you have a clear topic, think about what types of information you need to find. This will really depend on the topic. Scholarly articles are common, but books are useful for broader topics and getting an overview, and are more common in some areas. You might need data and statistics, business information, or a primary source like a film or diary that you`ll be analyzing.

WHERE TO SEARCH

When you have a topic and have decided what information you need, you'll need to figure out where to search for it.

For scholarly articles and books, the Omni library catalogue is a good starting point for many but not all topics. You can find the Omni search box in the middle of the library web page. Just type in your search.

Other search engines are more specialized for certain areas, and are better for some topics. You can find the best ones for your area by using the Library's Subject Guides. Find them in the Research menu on any Library web page. Click on the subject area closest to your topic. You'll see a list of recommended specialized search tools for that topic. At the bottom of the page, you can also check to see if there is a search guide for your specific course, which is customized for your assignment.

If you`re looking for statistics, videos, news articles or other types of sources, click on the Research menu and choose Other Research Materials to see links to search tips and tools for different types of information.

HOW TO SEARCH

Once you know where to search, think for a bit about how you will search before diving in.

It's helpful before you start to think about your topic and try to pull out the main concepts, then consider different words that can be used to describe those concepts. This will help make your search results better.

For example, if our topic is the difficulty of finding jobs for recent university graduates, our concepts will be difficulty, finding jobs, and new graduates.

Since different people use different terms for the same concept, think of other words people might use to talk about your concepts. In our example, alternate words for difficulty might be problems or barriers, for finding jobs they could be job search or employment, and for college graduates they might be university graduates.

Once you have your main concepts and alternate words, use them in your search. In many of the Library search engines, you put the alternate words for the same concept on one line separated with OR, and the different concepts on different lines separated by AND. You can find out more about using search words effectively in some of our other videos.

If you have a clear topic, search in the right place, and think about how to search, your searching will be more successful.

QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.

Let us know whether or not this video was helpful. Go to library.wlu.ca/videofeedback to give us feedback and help us improve.