

## SEARCH TERMS & TIPS

Some tips for turning your topic into a research strategy and making your searches more precise.

### **STEP ONE**

**State your research topic.**

Example: The impact of racial bias on death penalty sentences.

### **STEP TWO**

**Identify key concepts.**

Example topic: The impact of racial bias on death penalty sentences.

Example key concepts: racial bias, death penalty

### **STEP THREE**

**Brainstorm related terms.**

For example, google your topic or consult Wikipedia. Although these sources aren't always credible, they might help you learn the words, phrases, or vocabulary used when people discuss or debate your topic.

Examples:

Racial bias = discrimination, racism, prejudice

Death penalty = capital punishment, execution

## STEP FOUR

### Apply search strategies.

- Search for **synonyms**.  
Combine similar terms with OR.  
Example: capital punishment OR death penalty.
- Apply **phrase searching**.  
Use quotations to search for phrases.  
Example: “capital punishment”
- **Combine it all together** with AND  
Example:  
“capital punishment” OR “death penalty” AND “racial bias” OR racism OR discrimination OR prejudice
- Finally, **enclose related terms** in parentheses  
Example:  
 (“capital punishment” OR “death penalty”) AND (“racial bias” OR racism OR discrimination OR prejudice)

Searching: [Academic Search Complete](#) | [Choose Databases](#)

(“capital punishment” OR “death penalty”) Select a Field (optional) Search

AND (“racial bias” OR racism OR discrimination OR prejudice) Select a Field (optional) Clear ?

AND Select a Field (optional) + -

### More about Boolean Operators

**AND, OR,** and **NOT** are examples of Boolean operators.

**AND** - **narrows** your search. **ALL** keywords used must be found **in** an article.

Example: social media AND stress

**OR** - **broadens** a search. **Any** of the words it connects are acceptable. Use OR to search for synonyms.

Example: elementary school OR grade school

**NOT** – **narrows** your search by **eliminating** all search terms that follow it.

Example: social media NOT Facebook

(retrieves all articles about social media that do **not** mention Facebook)

For a visual demonstration of how Boolean operators work see **The Boolean Machine** at [rockwellschrock.com/rbs3k/boolean/](http://rockwellschrock.com/rbs3k/boolean/)

## **STEP FIVE**

**Repeat previous steps as needed.**

Your search terms may change as you narrow your focus.

Example: gun control

Narrowed focus: second amendment, right to keep and bear arms, guns and violence, school shootings