

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)

The screenshot shows the Academic Search Complete search interface. At the top, it says "Searching: Academic Search Complete | Choose Databases". Below the search bar, there are three main search fields separated by AND operators. The first field contains the query "(“capital punishment” OR “death penalty”)". The second field contains the query (“racial bias” OR racism OR discrimination). The third field is empty. To the right of each field is a "Select a Field (optional)" dropdown menu. A large green "Search" button is located to the right of the second field. Below the search area, there are "Clear" and help buttons, and a set of plus and minus buttons for refining the search.

More about Boolean Operators

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

AND - **narrow**s your search. **ALL** keywords used must be found **in** an article.
Example: social media AND stress

OR - **broaden**s a search. **Any** of the words it connects are acceptable. Use OR to search for synonyms.
Example: elementary school OR grade school

NOT – **narrow**s 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/

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