Search Online Book Catalogues, Databases, Search Engines

Keyword Search

Subject Search

Comparing Keyword and Subject Search

Combining Keyword and Subject Search

Search Techniques: Keyword Searching

What is a keyword?
A keyword is any word that describes the topic we are dealing with. It can be a conversation topic, a discussion topic, an essay topic, or a research title.

What is keyword searching?
Keyword searching is using these descriptive words to search for information concerning our topic of interest.

Keyword searches will be broad as the keyword(s) can be located in any where inside the record e.g. for a book record, the keyword can be inside the title, the subject, author's name, etc.
Keywords can also be combined into phrases to give different search results.

Keyword search is good for starting out on the search path as the search results can be used to locate more appropriate keywords and subject headings to get better results on our topic.

Ref: http://www.oit.edu/libraries/help/library-guides/keyword-vs-subject

Search Techniques: Subject Searching

Subject searching is actually searching the subject field of a record.

The subject field contains predetermined terms called subject headings which describe the information item.

e.g. The Library of Congress, USA provides an authoritative list of subject headings to categorize books.

Medline database uses MeSH (medical subject headings).

Normally for databases, their subject headings can be found inside their built-in thesaurus.

Unless we can identify the subject headings for the particular catalogue or database, subject search can be quite unrewarding.

Ref: http://www.oit.edu/libraries/help/library-guides/keyword-vs-subject

Search Techniques: Comparing Keyword and Subject Search

	Keyword Search	Subject Search
Search Results	Use words or phrases that describe the topic or words from research topic or thesis statement.	Use subject headings which are predefined terms
Number of Results	The number of results can be from zero to hundreds of thousands e.g. observe your Google search which can frustratingly return no searches and it prompts you with different search terms.	The number of results will be all on the searched for subject. It can be further reduced by searching the sub-headings of the subject.
Relevance	Results can include irrelevant items as well.	The search focused on the subject field of records retrieve relevant results unless the searcher used the wrong subject heading right from the start.
Flexibility	Searches all fields of a record	Field specific
Specificity	Keywords can be applied in any search facility. Keywords are just natural language words.	Different databases have different subject headings to categorize their records. Subject headings can be located in the thesaurus of the database.

Search Techniques: When to combine Keyword and Subject Search

Keyword Searching	Subject Searching	Research Tips from Oregon Tech Library
When we want to explore any aspects of a topic.	When we want to investigate a particular aspect of a topic e.g. online aspect of marketing.	Start with Keyword Search with keywords derived from our topic statement.
We do not know the title or author of the book(s) or article(s) required.	When we want to draw out subject specific documents in a database or catalog.	Obtain subject headings from the most relevant results of our keyword search.
We want to combine search terms.	We know what subject headings to use.	Use the subject headings or "terms" or "descriptors" to search further for relevant information on our topic.

Search Techniques

Please connect with the Library should you need to attend hands-on basic search skills sessions. Thank you very much.