# Mapping keywords

## What are keywords and why are they important?

Keywords are the search terms that you enter into the database or resource to describe the topic of sources that you want to retrieve. The database will match your keywords against the text of the source, displaying the matching results.

You can develop focused, precise searches for use in a search engine or database and get exactly what you need.

Databases will only look for the exact words and phrases you type into an interface. This means you must:

* Break your topic into individual keywords.
* Brainstorm the words an author might use.
* Avoid long, wordy phrases or sentences.

## Search matrix

To help you think about the different keywords you might use in a search, use a search matrix (below). Try to break down your keywords into board, narrower, or related keywords:

Broad words capture a large number and wide scope of subjects. Broader keywords will also find more search results (e.g., social media).

Narrow words are limited in extent, amount, or scope – usually much more specific and focused. These will find fewer search results (e.g., Twitter).

Related words are tenuously connected or associated with the main idea or keyword (e.g., Screen time).

## Starting with your question

Write down your question and identify the keywords – you should end up with no more than four or five per question.

Place your main keywords in the grey boxes and then write down any alternative words beneath them. Start with your broad alternative words and then think about more narrow terms.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Keyword table | | | | | |
| Your main keywords |  |  |  |  |  |
| Broad words |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Narrow words |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Related words |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |