Searching Tips & Techniques

There are certain techniques that will enable you to search the library catalog, electronic databases, and the Internet more effectively. By using these methods, you can expand or narrow searches to better meet your research needs. This will help eliminate “hits” unrelated to your chosen topic and reduce the time it would take to wade through unwanted material. The more you use these methods, the more efficient you will become.

Tips & Techniques

1. Begin your search in the online catalog by choosing a search type. Start with a **keyword search**, which will allow you to group terms and search across fields to expand or narrow your search.

2. Choose words that will be most relevant to the information you wish to obtain. You can combine keywords by using **Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT)**. For example:
   
   A. Use “AND” to narrow your search. By using “alcohol AND teenagers,” your results will be more specific than by using the term “alcohol” alone. Retrieved records will be only those that include both terms.

   B. Use “OR” to expand your search. Linking “alcohol OR drugs” will yield records with either the term “alcohol” or the term “drugs.” You will retrieve more records.

   C. Use “NOT” to exclude a term. By entering “drugs NOT addiction,” you will locate more material related to pharmacology than drug abuse.

3. Another important search tool is **truncation**. By using an “*” or “?” at the end of a root word, you can retrieve material containing all forms of the word. For example, “motor?” retrieves many terms including: motor, motorin’, motorcycle, motors, and Motorola.

4. **Quotations marks** can be used to find phrases. For example, adding quotation marks around “adolescent health” will pull up only those records that have the word “adolescent” before “health.”

5. Academic databases and the Internet can be similarly searched. Most search engines support Boolean searches. Different databases use different symbols to truncate words; check database **HELP** for more tips. Because the Internet is unregulated, use it with extreme caution. Biased, erroneous sources are plentiful.