

Info skills

Starting your search



General search tips

- Make sure you are clear on your strategy before you start – what information you need and which types of resources you are looking for. See the ‘Types of information sources’ guide for further Information.
- Don’t forget to use your reading list and/or module guide as a starting point for good sources to help with your assignment.
- Use your assignment title to find keywords and phrases to use in your search. See the ‘Understand assignment title’ guide.
- It’s important to use all types of resources that may be available so you will need to use the full range of search tools: the Library Search and databases, internet subject gateways and search engines, and possibly other libraries via the SCONUL Access scheme.
- The Library Search is always your best starting point for a wide range of quality resources.
- Books are good for overviews and introductions to a topic but journal articles are essential for the most up-to-date thinking on a topic.
- Using the library search tools will get you quality-assured information quickly. This will be quicker and more fruitful than using an internet search engine.
- Don’t give up too quickly if you find that you are not getting very many useful pieces of information. This maybe because you are using the wrong tools for the job or there may be some better keywords or combination of search terms that you could be using. Developing useful searches takes time.

Search strings

There are three powerful words you can use to target your searches more effectively. They are AND, OR and NOT, sometimes called ‘Boolean operators’. Use them to combine your keywords in different ways.

Boolean operator	Definition	More or less?
AND	AND is used to combine different concepts e.g. ‘politics AND media’.	AND narrows your search.
OR	OR is used to allow for alternatives e.g. ‘politics OR election’.	OR broadens your search.
NOT	NOT is used when the same keyword has different meanings.	NOT narrows your search.

To search for a whole phrase, put the words in between quotation marks. For example, “global warming” will find results on the topic of global warming. Without the quotation marks you would get results for the individual words ‘global’ and ‘warming’ as well, so this is another very useful way to target your search.

Searching on-campus

- You will need your student card to enter the library and to issue books, please carry it with you at all times.
- Walk around the library early on to familiarise yourself with the layout. Pick up guides to the locations of various shelf numbers from the library counter.
- Have a pen and paper or reading list with you so you can make a note of the shelf numbers of your books.
- Never be afraid to ask a member of library staff if you hear or read something you don't understand related to the library!
- Try to attend your library induction session as many of library and research terms will be explained there by your Subject Librarian as well as useful tips for searching for subject resources.
- It is very important to monitor your library account on a regular basis to make sure your loans are all up-to-date and you are notified of any requested books waiting for you.

Searching off-campus

- The Library Search can be accessed from an online PC anywhere in the world.
- E-books are very useful to distance learners because there is no need to issue or return the books at the library.
- E-books are searchable and accessible from the Library Search, and you can access it from anywhere in the world.
- Most databases can be used off-campus to browse for journal articles.