

Step 2. Search terms

After defining the search query, you have to come up with search terms. The use of the right search terms is very important. Maybe you are used to enter a few terms in the search bar at random. If you do not immediately find the information you are looking for in this way, you may wrongly think that the information is not there. By coming up with search terms in a structured way before you start searching, your search results will be much better.

This chapter is about:

- Finding search term
- Tools

Finding search terms

An effective way of searching is the "building block method". You first divide your (search) question into a number of components. Based on this, you will come up with specific search terms with which you will search.

Example:

You are looking for literature on Renaissance art from Italy.

Your question is: What are the main characteristics of Italian Renaissance art?

The main components of this question are:

- Renaissance
- Art
- Italy

Renaissance	Art	Italy
Rebirth	Art	Italy
Mannerism	Painting Art	Tuscan
Etc.	Sculpture Art	Tuscany
	Etc.	Florence
		Etc.

When thinking of search terms, you can think of

Variant	Example
BT = Broader Term	Cultural History
<i>NT=Narrower Term</i>	Painting art Sculpture art
<i>RT=Related Term</i>	Humanism
Spelling variants	14 th century Fourteenth century
Inflections	Tuscany Tuscan
(quasi)Synonyms	Rebirth Early Modern Time
Technical terms	Mannerism
Singular or Plural use	Artist Artists
Translations	Italia Arte
Compounds	Online On line (Engelse taal)
Abbreviations	IT = Italy

Antonyms



Sometimes it can be useful to search with antonyms. These are words with an opposite meaning that can also provide relevant information.

Examples of antonyms are:

Unemployment - employment

prosperity - poverty

growth – shrinkage

Tips for search terms

Scientists and other professionals use professional terms in their publications. If you do not know these terms, you may easily miss important publications.

- Check out a number of scientific or professional publications on your topic to find out more about specific jargon.
- Search for specific (subject) terms by trying out some of the search terms you already have. Search the results for new search terms. You can use the Snowball method (see step 4 search methods).

Tools

If you are not yet familiar with the terminology of your topic, you can use a number of tools to help you come up with search terms:

Dictionaries

- General dictionaries
- Subject dictionaries such as technical dictionaries, medical dictionaries etc.

Thesauri

A thesaurus is a keyword list that contains references to related keywords. It contains synonyms and you can see which words are related to each other.

A term like visual art refers to the broader term art, but also to the more specific terms painting and photography.

More information about thesauri and examples can be found under Thesauri and Classification schemes (see step 4 search methods).