How to Start a Search

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What is Keyword Searching?

Searching by keyword is a fantastic way to start your search in any database! Important words and phrases are used to search for results.

What is Subject Searching?

Searching by subjects allows you to get more specific results. Each database categorizes records under subject terms, which vary by database. Knowing these subject terms allows you to find extremely relevant records.

Keyword Search	Subject Heading Search
Natural language words that describe your subject	"Controlled vocabulary" words predetermined by the database to describe the content of each record
More flexible – can combine keywords in many ways	Less flexible – must use exact "controlled vocabulary" words
Database searches for keywords throughout the records	Database searches for subjects in the subject heading or descriptor field only
May find too many or too few results	Usually won't get too many results, but if too many, can use subheadings to focus the search
May find irrelevant results	Results will be very relevant to your topic

How to Start Searching

- Start with keyword searching. Use words and phrases that best describe your topic
- When you find 2 or 3 relevant results, take a look in their Subject or Descriptor Field. Write down the terms used
- Do another search using the terms you found
- Your results should be more relevant than your original search