QUICK TIPS ON KEYWORDS
A. Bailin, MLS, PhD
Axinn Library

Identifying Keywords

Whether you are searching on an online database, a library catalog or the Web, the *keywords* that you use to do your searching are an important element in determining how successful your search will be. Here are some ideas you might find useful:

- **Write down your thesis or the question you are trying to answer and highlight the main words.** Use one or more of these words to do your search.
  
  **Example:** What were the *causes* of the *American Civil War*.

- **Think of words that have a meaning related to the terms you are using.**
  
  **Example:** *American* $\rightarrow$ *United States*

Using Keywords

- **If you are getting too many items**
  
  - use more words, and
  
  - connect them with AND (or the equivalent, depending on your search tool).
  
  **Example:** *United States* AND *Civil War* AND *causes*

- **If you are getting too few items**
  
  - use less words, and/or
  
  - use synonyms connected with OR.
  
  **Example:** *Civil War* AND (*American* or *United States*)

- **If you are getting irrelevant items**
  
  - find one or more words that characterize those items and
  
  - use NOT to get rid of those items.
  
  **Example:** *Civil War* NOT *tourism*