Keywords, Synonyms, and Phrase Searching

In this video, you will learn how to:
- use keywords, synonyms, and phrases to craft your searches.

When searching article databases or the library catalogue, UNB WorldCat, avoid entering your entire research question. Unlike a Google search, UNB Libraries' databases work best with keywords, synonyms, and phrases that describe your topic. Keeping this in mind will improve the quality of your search results.

Keywords are the most important concepts in your question. In this example,

How does the use of mobile devices in the evening affect sleep quality among young adults?

Here are my key concepts or keywords: *mobile devices, sleep quality, and young adults.*

Synonyms are words or phrases similar to, or meaning almost the same thing as, a given word or phrase. Synonyms allow you to tap into the prefered language of a database and thus increase your chances of fewer but more relevant results. In our example, these are the synonyms:

Mobile devices: wireless technologies, tablets, phones
Sleep quality: sleep patterns, sleep habits, restfulness
Young adults: adolescents, youths, teens

Phrases are two or more words held together by quotation marks (" "). This is one more way to increase the precision and relevance of retrieved information because databases will typically insert AND between the words unless you use quotation marks. For instance, a keyword search for *mobile technologies* will return a mix of entries with the word *mobile* and others with *technologies.* Here are examples of phrases in our key concepts:

"Mobile devices:" "wireless technologies," tables, phones
"Sleep quality:" "sleep patterns," sleep habits, restfulness
"Young adults:Transcript" adolescents, youths, teens

Keep in mind that it is useful to do preliminary reading to see how other authors describe your topic. You can use reference works to start collecting keywords and phrases. Some databases provide subject terms and thesauri that tell you which terms to use when researching your topic.

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