



University of Sydney Library: Search Smarter, Search Faster

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Learning outcomes

After completing this *learning tool*, you should be able to:

- Identify the key concepts from a given research topic
- Explain the use of synonyms in a search
- Explain the use of Boolean operators in a search
- Construct an effective search strategy using appropriate keywords, synonyms and Boolean operators from a given research topic

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Search Smarter, Search Faster

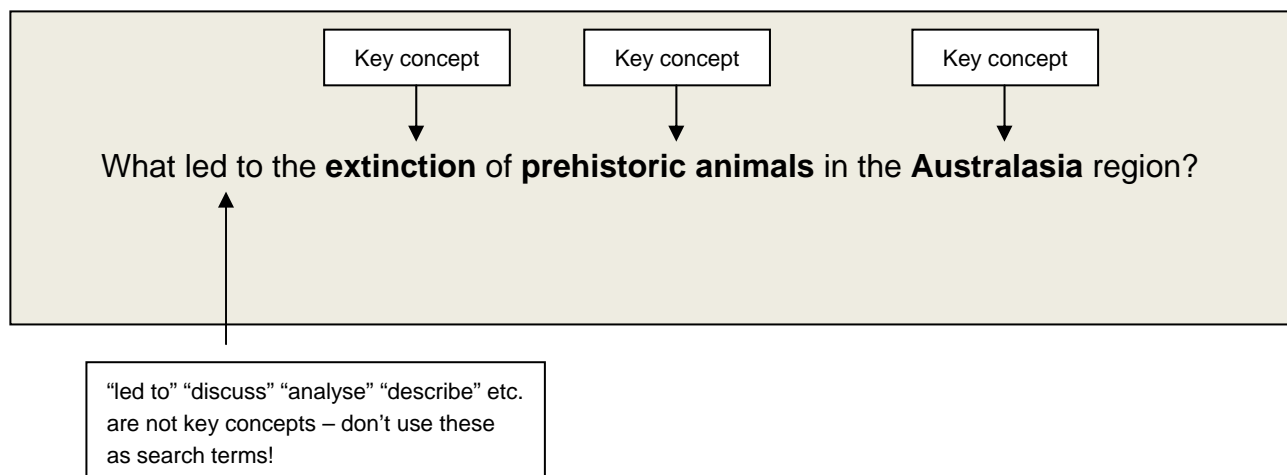
Whatever your topic is you can search smarter and faster by applying the following strategy. We will use the following essay question as an example but the logic is applicable to just about every single essay question you approach.

Sample essay topic:

What led to the extinction of prehistoric animals in the Australasia region?

Step 1: Isolate your keywords

- You need to think and plan your research before you start. Typing your question verbatim into a database won't work.
- Identify the key concepts in your topic. A key concept is an important idea in the question or statement.



Step 2: Combine search terms

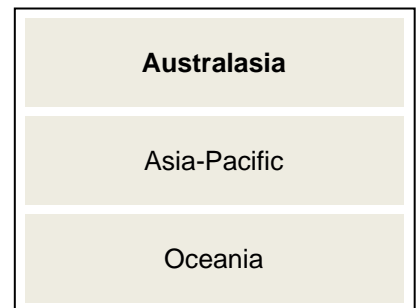
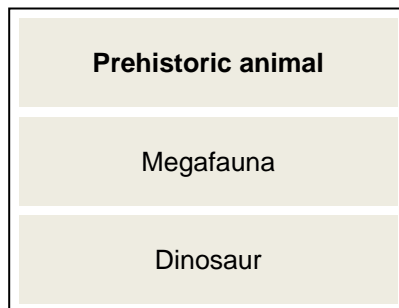
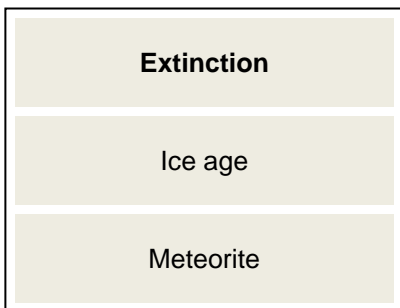
- Rather than search for each separate concept, use AND to combine each concept in a single search. This is a faster and more effective way to search. See below:

prehistoric animal **AND** extinction **AND** Australasia

Step 3: Use synonyms

Scenario: Imagine there are 3 really good journal articles on your topic that would be perfect for your paper but they don't all use the same words to describe their research – the terms are slightly different but they are all writing on the same themes. How can we construct a search that will retrieve all 3 articles?

- Because keyword searching only retrieves exactly what you search for, it's necessary to think of alternate terms or synonyms to describe your topic. The diagrams below suggest synonyms for each key concept in the essay question.



- Once you have identified the synonyms you can combine them in a search string using the word **OR**. Group your synonyms with brackets. For example:

(prehistoric animal **OR** megafauna **OR** dinosaur)

- Having trouble thinking up synonyms? You can look them up in a thesaurus.

Step 4: Put it all together

(prehistoric animal **OR** megafauna **OR** dinosaur)
AND
 (extinction **OR** ice age **OR** meteorite)
AND
 (australasia **OR** asia-pacific **OR** oceania)