Search Strategies

- Identify the different concepts in your research question e.g. if you are searching for information about feminist poetry, the concepts would be feminist and poetry. The key concepts are your search terms.
- Are there any synonyms or related terms for your search terms? e.g. women, female, feminine or feminist
- Are there any alternative spellings or abbreviations e.g. woman or women, feminist or feminism
- If you get too many results, try narrowing down your search by using a more specific search concept or by adding more search concepts (for example for women writing poetry you could add a particular country or time period). Alternatively try limiting by date (for example last 2 years) or by format (e.g. peer reviewed articles only)
- If you get too few results, try using broader search terms (e.g. women and literature, or gender and literature)
- Once you have found some good results, look at the full details and see what keywords the database has used in describing the item. This can give you more ideas for search term. In some cases you will be able to click on the keywords to see everything in the database on that topic. This is called the “one good record” method.

Using Boolean operators and truncation

You can use these techniques to improve the results of your keyword searching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AND</strong></td>
<td>retrieves all the terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OR</strong></td>
<td>retrieves one or more of the words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOT</strong></td>
<td>excludes a term</td>
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<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>retrieves variant endings</td>
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E.g. (female OR woman) AND poetry

- To combine the distinct concepts in your search use **AND**. This tells the database that both concepts must be present in your results, e.g. feminist AND poetry
- When using synonyms, use **OR** to specify that one or other of your terms but not necessarily both should appear in your search terms, e.g. poetry OR lyric
- When using **AND** and **OR** in the same search use brackets around the terms combined using **OR**, e.g. (female OR woman) AND poetry
- Use “quotation marks” to look for a specific phrase (where words have a particular meaning when they are together), e.g. “New World”
- To find alternative word endings use * e.g. modern* finds modern, modernist, modernism, modernismo
- To find alternative spellings use ? e.g. wom?n finds women and woman
- Some databases also allow you to use proximity operators to specify that particular words must appear near to one another. Consult **Help** from within the database to see if this is an option and to fully explore all the search options.