

STEP 5: DEVELOP SEARCH STRINGS

You now need to combine your various search terms to retrieve records about your specific research question.

Search terms belonging to the [same concept](#) are combined with the operator **OR**. OR retrieves records which contain any, all, or a combination of the search terms within that concept. Each time you add a new search term in your Concept, and combine with OR you retrieve more records. Be sure to place phrases inside quotation marks.

- “college education” **or** degree
- occupation **or** vocation
- salary **or** wages

Search terms belonging to [different concepts](#) are combined with the operator **AND**. AND retrieves records which include only records in which all of the Search Concepts appear. Each time you add a new Search Concept, and combine with AND you retrieve fewer records. Be sure to place phrases inside quotation marks.

- “college education” **and** retail **and** supervisor **and** salary
- degree **and** “retail manager” **and** wages
- Training **and** “Old Navy” **and** compensation

You can also combine OR with AND to develop more complex search strings. Place parenthesis around phrases joined by OR. Remember, the more you use OR, the more results you will have. The more you use AND, the fewer results you will have.

- (“college education” **or** degree) **and** “retail manager” **and** (wages **or** salary)
- (degree **or** training) **and** (“Old Navy” **or** “Helzberg Diamonds”) **and** (management **or** supervisor) **and** (compensation **or** pension)

Wayne State
College

U.S. Conn Library

U.S. Conn Library • Wayne State College • www.wsc.edu/library • (402)375-7258

Developing a Research Strategy

How do I go about doing research?

Prior to starting your search in any database, it is important to spend some time planning your search strategy. This planning helps to define your search topic clearly. It also helps to minimize the time spent searching the database for research articles on your topic. How a search is constructed can determine what is retrieved and what is not retrieved.

STEP 1: NARROW YOUR TOPIC

Formulate your research topic into a focused research question. Be as concise and specific as possible. A lot of times you will start with a broad topic. A general topic can be narrowed...and narrowed topics can be even more specific.

General Topic— Careers

Narrowed Topic— Business Careers

More Specific Topic—Retail Management

A fully developed topic may include even more specific concepts.

Ask Yourself Questions About Your Topic:

- What **do** you know about it? What **don't** you know?
- What **time period** do you want to cover? Since 1990? This year? In the future?
- On what **geographic region** do you want to focus? Do you want to focus on social norms & values, economic & political systems, or languages?
- On what **population** do you want to focus? Gender, age, occupation, ethnicity, nationality, educational attainment, species, etc?
- From what **viewpoint** do you want to examine the topic? Historical, social, legal, medical, ethical, biological, psychological, economic, political, philosophical? A viewpoint allows you to focus on a single aspect.

What kind of information do you need?

- a brief summary or a lengthy explanation?
- periodical articles, books, essays, encyclopedia articles?
- statistics?

Subtopics	Examples
Education	retail management for college grads
Location	retail management in Nebraska
Experience	entry level retail management
Gender	females in retail management
Time Period	retail management of the 1990s

STEP 2: CREATE A RESEARCH QUESTION

Once you have a narrowed topic, form it into a question so that you are seeking an answer. A research question directs your research, because you'll spend your time working with sources that will help you answer the question you've posed.

Let's say your topic is **retail management for college grads**. Can you imagine how many sources discuss retail management for college grads? Tons... and that's a bad thing! You'd spend hours looking through sources that matched your search. You couldn't get by with just pulling the top 10 sources, either. You'd find your sources would be on all different aspects of retail management for college graduates.

In other words, your research wouldn't have any focus. But, if you ask a question BEFORE YOU BEGIN RESEARCHING like: **How does a college education affect a retail manager's salary?** You wouldn't have as much sorting to do. You'd only have to look for sources that answered your question.

To develop a research question, try using one of these question starters to formulate a research question of your own:

Question Word	Examples
WHY?	Why do some retailers require managers to hold college degrees?
HOW?	How does a college education affect a retail manager's salary?
WHAT?	What is the relationship between job placement and retail managers holding college degrees?

STEP 3: IDENTIFY SEARCH CONCEPTS

No matter where you're searching, you will need to pick out the most important **keywords**. Most research questions can be broken down into two to four main concepts. These are generally nouns.

How does a college education affect a retail manager's salary?

STEP 4: SELECT SEARCH SYNONYMS

In order to conduct the most comprehensive search possible, it is important to find synonyms for each of your search concepts. Vocabulary can be broadened or narrowed to find different types of sources:

Broader terms. What broad disciplines or subjects may address your research question?

Related terms. Synonyms and other terms that describe issues or activities that relate to your key concepts.

Narrower terms. Specific examples of your key concepts. These might be cases, events, names, places, etc.

KEYWORD	NARROW RELATED WORDS	BROADER RELATED WORDS
College education	Wayne State College, degree, program	training, instruction, schooling
Retail	Old Navy, Helzberg Diamonds, sales, store, retailer	occupation, vocation, business
Manager	supervisor, managerial, management	person, profession, career
Salary	pension, wage, wages, paycheck, take-home pay	compensation, contract, money, payment

The list you make will help you search for your topic. When you brainstorm related words, be sure to include everything you can think of. Many databases provide a **Thesaurus** or a **Subject Guide**. Look for it. Enter a concept from your research question. Then follow the links to broader, related and narrower topics, all of which can be used as keywords in your search. You can also use a hard-cover Thesaurus or an online Thesaurus like <http://www.thesaurus.com> to find search terms.