**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)

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**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?
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:

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

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:

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

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 hardcover Thesaurus or an online Thesaurus like [http://www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com) to find search terms.