

What are keywords and why are they important?  
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You have a research assignment and need to use the library's databases to find different information sources.

When searching for sources in library databases, you will need to use specific search terms known as “keywords.” Picking the right keywords is an important part of the research process and can affect your search results.

Keywords should represent the main concepts in the topic you’re exploring. Generally speaking, they are single words or short phrases that can be combined in various forms to generate different search results. Even if you’ve never done academic research before, you probably already have experience developing keywords.

For example, maybe you searched online for the showtimes for a new movie you wanted to see. You probably used the title of the film and the word “showtimes” as your keywords to bring up the results you needed.

Keywords in academic research are similar. For example, let’s say your research question is “how does cyberbullying affect teenagers’ mental health?”

First, you’ll want to think about what the main concepts are. In this case, that would be **cyberbullying**, **teenagers**, and **mental health**.

Next, consider what words or short phrases will help you find information for each main concept. Remember that there is usually more than one way to say the same thing, so try to think of relevant synonyms as well.

For example, for **teenagers**, you would probably want to list **adolescents** and **students**, but you might also consider using **high school** as a related term for **students**.

Once you have a starting list of keywords, try searching in different databases to see if you’re on the right track and can get relevant results.

Pay attention to the language used in the sources you find. You may see other words you can use that you hadn’t thought of yet that you can use as additional keywords.

As you keep searching for sources and trying new keywords, contact UH Libraries if you need further help.