Developing a Search Strategy

A search strategy is the combination of keywords and synonyms you choose and the way you connect them with AND, OR, and NOT (also known as “Boolean operators”). An example search strategy is at the end of this sheet.

To focus your search and ensure you are getting sources that combine all aspects of your topic, use AND. Adding terms with AND will give you fewer results:

\( \text{car AND hydrogen AND environment} \) will find sources that use all three of these terms.

To expand your search and find sources that use different words for the same thing, use OR. Adding terms with OR will give you more results:

\( \text{car OR vehicle OR automobile} \) will give you sources that use any of these terms, alone or in combination with each other.
To omit certain terms from your results, use **NOT**. For example, you may have done an initial search and found that many of the sources you found related to Ford. This is great, but you are interested in other car manufacturers too. You want to filter out the articles about Ford so you can only see the ones about other manufacturers.

**car NOT Ford** will discard any of the articles that mention Ford.

Other search tips:
- Use an asterisk (*) to truncate words if you want to search for all words with that root. For example, “environment*” would search for environment, environmental, environmentalism, etc.
- Put quotes around a phrase that you want the database to search as a phrase, rather than as individual words.
- Group synonyms inside parentheses using OR between each one

Search strategy example: using the example keywords and synonyms table on the worksheet, one search strategy might be:

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(car OR automobile OR vehicle) AND hydrogen AND environment*
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