Define your topic and identify the main concepts and related keywords

Let’s imagine your topic was ‘Email is a popular form of communication, but how secure is it?’

We can break this topic down into two main concepts:

- **Concept 1** email
- **Concept 2** security

Next, think of similar words (synonyms) or related words that describe your main concepts. Remember to include plurals and alternative spellings. Keywords for this topic could include:

- **Concept 1** email, electronic mail
- **Concept 2** security, privacy, spam

Now we’ve identified our keywords, we’re ready to search! For more help with identifying keywords, please see the *Think. Plan. Discover. Why keywords matter* video.

Connect your keywords

Once you’ve decided on your keywords, you need to connect them together using what are called **connectors** or “Boolean operators”. How you connect your search terms together can make a big difference to your results.

There are three main connectors that are used when searching. These are **OR**, **AND** and **NOT**.

Using OR

Your search will find items containing either one or both of your keywords. Use **OR** to search for words with similar meanings.

This search will find items that contain the keyword *email*, or the keyword *electronic mail*, or both terms. Connecting your search terms with **OR** will broaden it and will retrieve more items. You get “more with OR”.

When searching for information think about the keywords or phrases that describe your topic and search for them to find the information you need. Typing a sentence explaining your topic will most likely retrieve results of little or no relevance.
Using AND

Your search will only find items containing both of your keywords. Use AND to combine different concepts that you want to bring together.

This search will find items that contain both the keyword email and the keyword security in the same item. Connecting your search terms with AND will make your search more specific.

Using NOT

Your search will find items containing the first of your keywords but not the other. Use NOT when you want to exclude known irrelevant concepts from your search results.

This search will find items that contain the keyword email, but will exclude any that also contain the keyword spam. Connecting your search terms with NOT will narrow your search and retrieve fewer results.

Be cautious using NOT however, as you may exclude potentially useful results.

Searching databases

In many databases you can select the connector you want from a drop down box. Use more than one connector to build more complex searches.

Other databases allow you to type these connectors into a single search box. You can connect search terms using different connectors in the same search line, but you need to use round brackets / parentheses () to indicate which search terms should be processed first.

The round brackets tell the database to first search for all the items which contain either email or electronic mail and then retrieve only those articles from the first search which also include the term security.

Use the Search Tips or Help available in each database to ensure you are entering your search terms correctly.
For further information about Library resources and services visit: www.library.unisa.edu.au/