



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.

## 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.

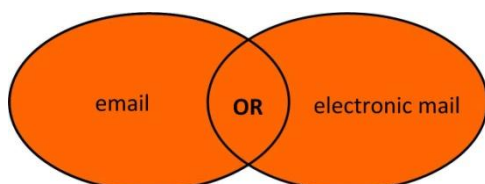
## Connect your keywords

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.

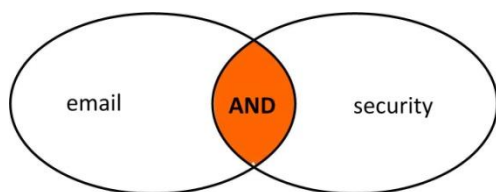


This search will find items that contain the keyword *email*, or the keyword *electronic mail*, or both terms. Connecting your search terms with **OR** will broaden it and will retrieve more items. You get "more with **OR**".



## Using AND

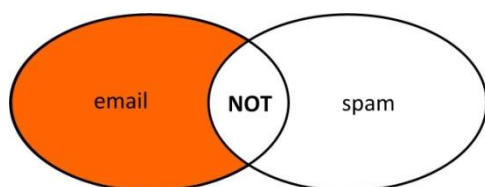
Your search will only find items containing both of your keywords. Use **AND** to combine different concepts that you want to bring together.



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/](http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/)

