

# HUNTER Formulating a Search Strategy Learning Module

*This document provides a written summary of the Formulating a Search Strategy learning module, as well as a worksheet that you can use to help formulate your own strategy when conducting research.*

## Summary

Database searching is different from searching the web with Google or Yahoo. But once you learn how to do it, you'll find better sources and maybe even write better papers.

Formulating a search strategy involves a lot of common sense. Here are the three steps:

1. Define what you want the articles you find to be about.
2. List all the relevant keywords.
3. Organize how the keywords will be entered.

### Step 1 – Define what you want the articles you find to be about

The first step in formulating your search strategy is defining what you want the articles you find to be about. You do this by breaking your topic into concepts.

For example, the topic “impact of class size on academic achievement” can be broken down into the following concepts:

Concept 1	Concept 2
class size	academic achievement

### Step 2 – List all the relevant keywords

The second step is to identify similar or related keywords or keyword phrases that are connected to your defined concepts. Remember, the better the keywords, the better the search results.

For example, under concept two, you can add a similar keyword phrase, “student performance.”

Concept 1	Concept 2
class size	academic achievement or <b>student performance</b>

If you're not sure what keywords might be appropriate, you can use the database's thesaurus. The thesaurus contains a searchable list of terms that are used in a database.

### Step 3 – Organize how the keywords will be entered

The last step is to organize how you will enter your keywords into the search field. The key to this is establishing the right relationships between your concepts using search operators “and” and “or” and parentheses.

For example, using the table below, your search entry would look like this:

#### **class size and academic achievement**

Concept 1	Concept 2
class size	academic achievement

Adding a second keyword to concept two requires us to group keywords using parentheses. For example using the table below, your search entry would look like this:

#### **class size and (academic achievement or student performance)**

Concept 1	Concept 2
class size	academic achievement or student performance

## Understanding Truncation

To pick up possible variations in spelling or word endings, you can use truncation. The most common truncation symbol is the asterisk (\*). For example, using the asterisk at the end of perform\* would pick up variations such as: performing or performance, as well as perform.

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## Worksheet

### Step 1 – Define what you want the articles you find to be about (Break topic into concepts)

Instructions: Write your topic on the column to the left and then break your topic into one or more relevant concepts.

Topic	Concept 1	Concept 2	Concept 3	Concept 4	Concept 5
<i>Example:</i> impact of class size on academic achievement	class size	academic achievement			

### Step 2 – List all the relevant keywords

Instructions: Add similar or related keywords for your concepts.

Topic	Concept 1	Concept 2	Concept 3	Concept 4	Concept 5
<i>Example:</i> impact of class size on academic achievement	class size	academic achievement or student performance			

### Step 3 – Organize how the keywords will be entered

Instructions: Use AND/OR to connect concept columns. Use AND/OR to connect keywords within a concept column.

Use parentheses to group keywords within a column.

Topic	Concept 1		Concept 2		Concept 3		Concept 4		Concept 5
<i>Example:</i> impact of class size on academic achievement	class size	and	(academic achievement or student performance)						
Final Search Entry: class size and (academic achievement or student performance)									
Final Search Entry:									