

HOW TO IDENTIFY KEYWORDS

Before you start searching for information take time to decide which words best describe your topic. These words are called keywords and are used for searching in a variety of places like:

- Library catalogues
- The contents page and index in books
- Journal article databases
- Internet search engines

It is important to **choose good keywords** because they influence the relevance of search results. Good keywords will also reduce the amount of time spent searching for information. Think about the topic you need to research or the question you need to answer and identify the most significant words or concepts. Record these words in a list. In the following question the significant words are underlined.

‘What effect does the media have on the body image of women?’

Are there **similar words** you could use? Use a thesaurus to identify synonyms and add the new terms to your search list.

Media	Body image	Women
Television	Self esteem	Females
Radio		
Newspapers		
Magazines		

Are there **alternate spellings** you should be aware of when searching? There are some spelling differences between United Kingdom and American English. Does this apply to any of your keywords? Using a UK spelling in an American resource may affect your results. Record any alternate spellings in your search list.

Finally, newspapers and magazines may use **plain language** to describe a topic while journals and databases may use more **academic or scholarly terms**. Keep this in mind and copy new keywords and phrases to your search list.

If you’re searching the library catalogue or a journal database check the **subject headings** for new and relevant keywords to add to your search list.