

# Northeast Lakeview College LRC

## Resource Guide – Developing a Search Strategy

[www.alamo.edu/nlc/library](http://www.alamo.edu/nlc/library)

### **Why is a search strategy necessary?**

Spending a little time now to develop and plan your search strategy can save you *lots* of time later on! If you know what you are looking for, your search experience will be easier, quicker, and more likely to produce useful results.

### **Step 1: Choose and define a topic.**

- Choose a topic you find somewhat interesting, assuming it fits within the assignment guidelines.
- For potential topic ideas, try looking in your textbook or a general book/encyclopedia which covers the subject area.
- A good topic can often be written out as a question, for example, “How does violence in the media impact teenagers?”.
- After you begin your research, you may realize that your topic is either too narrow (not enough information on it) or too broad (too much information on it), in which case you will probably need to refine your topic.

### **Step 2: Identify the main concepts of the topic: Analyze, Brainstorm, and Combine (ABC)!**

**Analyze!** Analyze your topic and identify the main **components/concepts**. Try listing these concepts as keywords or phrases, for example:

Concept 1: media

Concept 2: violence

Concept 3: teenagers

Possible Concept 4: impact

**Brainstorm!** For each concept, brainstorm a list of synonyms, broader concepts, narrower concepts, related concepts, and specific examples. It may be useful to consult a **thesaurus**, such as Thesaurus.com: <http://thesaurus.reference.com/>.

Concept 1 (media): mass communication, mass media, television, movies, newspaper, radio, Internet, video games, film, publishing

Concept 2 (violence): aggression, anger, crime, guns, weapons, murder, assault

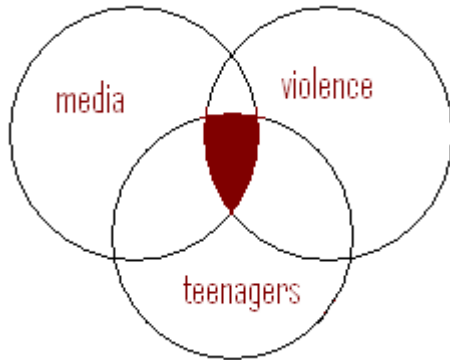
Concept 3 (teenagers): juveniles, adolescents, minors, youth, children

Possible Concept 4 (impact): affect, effects, cause

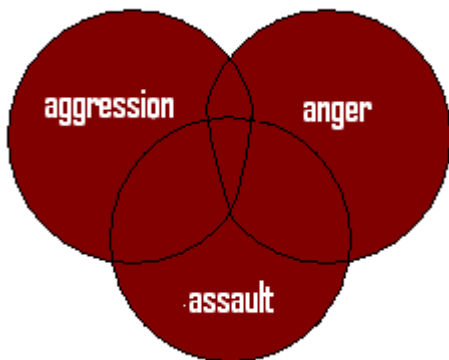
**Combine!** Connect your terms together via the following *Boolean operators*:

**AND** – all terms must be included. This will narrow your search.

Example: media AND violence AND teenagers



**OR** – any or all terms can be included. This will broaden your search.  
Example: aggression OR anger OR assault



**NOT** (sometimes listed as AND NOT) – excludes items with second term. This will narrow your search.  
Example: media NOT television (excludes items which mention television)



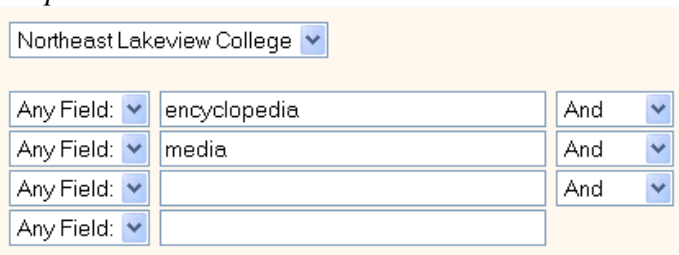
**Step 3: Locate background information.**

The following sources can help you gain a general understanding of your topic and its scope:

- *Your textbook*

- **Encyclopedias** – Try searching the [Alamo Library Online Catalog](http://library.alamo.edu/search/X) (<http://library.alamo.edu/search/X>) for a specialized encyclopedia which covers your topic.

*Sample search:*



*Sample result:*

LOCATION	CALL #	STATUS
NLC Reference	<a href="#">HQ784.M3 E53 2007</a> v.1	LIB USE ONLY
NLC Reference	<a href="#">HQ784.M3 E53 2007</a> v.2	LIB USE ONLY

An encyclopedia entry can give you an overview of the topic and also provide you with suggestions for additional search terms. Most entries are followed by a list of “Further Readings” or a “Bibliography” which can lead you to more information. Also, try looking up your topic in our online [Encyclopedia Britannica](#).

- **Dictionaries** – Try searching the [Alamo Library Online Catalog](http://library.alamo.edu/search/X) for a subject-specific dictionary to help familiarize yourself with the terminology of the field.
- **Other reference books & e-books** – Encyclopedias and dictionaries are usually considered “reference” books; they do not check out and can only be used in the library. Other reference books can also be great sources of background information. Try searching the [Alamo Library Online Catalog](http://library.alamo.edu/search/X) for your search term(s) and limit the location to “NLC Reference”. However, some of these books may also be available as E-Books, so don’t forget to search our [Electronic Books](#) collection as well.



#### Step 4: Determine the type and number of sources needed.

Your instructor may have given you some guidelines regarding the type and number of sources required for your paper, for example, a minimum of 2 books and 3 scholarly journal articles. Keep in mind that many instructors won’t allow you to count encyclopedias and dictionaries towards the total number of required sources. *Some questions to ask yourself:*

- Does my topic require particularly **recent** material or material **from a certain timeframe**? The latest, most up to date information is usually found in periodical articles, not books, since books take longer to be published.
- Do I need sources with a **broad** or **narrow** focus? Books often contain a broad treatment of a subject, while most periodical articles are narrowly focused on a particular aspect of a subject.
- Do I need to find any **primary sources** (firsthand accounts such as diaries, letters, original research, etc.) about my topic?
- Do any of my sources need to be “**scholarly**” or “**peer-reviewed**”? If so, many databases offer a check-box to select this option.
- What type of materials will my instructor accept as sources? Books? Newspapers? Magazines? Journals? Websites?

### Step 5: Find & evaluate books & e-books (if applicable).

Use the [Alamo Library Online Catalog](#) to search for both print books and electronic books owned by any or all ACCD campuses. Try using the **Advanced Keyword Search** (default) to search for the Boolean combinations you created in Step 2. Searching for a concept as **Subject** can help narrow your search.

#### Sample search:

Northeast Lakeview College ▾			
Subject: ▾	media	And ▾	
Subject: ▾	violence	And ▾	
Any Field: ▾		And ▾	
Any Field: ▾			

To search for an exact phrase, enclose it in quotes:

Northeast Lakeview College ▾			
Subject: ▾	media	And ▾	
Subject: ▾	violence	And ▾	
Any Field: ▾	"video games"	And ▾	
Any Field: ▾			

To search for multiple variations of a word, use an asterisk for 1-5 characters, or two asterisks for over 5 characters:

Northeast Lakeview College ▾			
Subject: ▾	media	And ▾	
Subject: ▾	violence	And ▾	
Any Field: ▾	child*	And ▾	
Any Field: ▾			

Try searching for materials at other ACCD campuses as well. You can check out these items in person at that campus, or place an [In-District Borrowing Request](#).

## Step 6: Find & evaluate journal, magazine, and newspaper articles (if applicable).

Journals, magazines, and newspapers are all considered to be “**periodicals**”, which means they are published on a regular basis at set intervals. Use our [Electronic Databases](#) to locate online articles from periodicals. Be sure to choose a database which covers the appropriate subject (see our listing of “**Databases by Subject**”). For current events / controversial topics, you might try [Opposing Viewpoints Center](#) or a general database such as [Academic Search Complete](#). We have two databases which specifically cover newspaper articles: [InfoTrac Custom Newspapers](#) and [Newspaper Source](#).

The same type of search strategies you used to locate books and e-books can be used in the electronic databases. Look for an **Advanced Search** option in order to enter multiple terms/phrases. Be sure to also select any appropriate **limiters**, such as date, “peer-reviewed”, etc.

*Sample search:*

The screenshot shows an "Advanced Search" interface with three search criteria:

- Criteria 1: Subject(su) dropdown menu, text input field containing "media".
- Criteria 2: "And" dropdown menu, Subject(su) dropdown menu, text input field containing "violen\*".
- Criteria 3: "And" dropdown menu, Keyword(ke) dropdown menu, text input field containing "child\*".

Some databases contain **fulltext** of all the articles, while others contain just citations (information about the article, such as author, title, etc.) or a mix of citations and fulltext. If you locate an article you’d like to see and fulltext is not available, use our [A to Z Journal Locator](#) to see if we have the fulltext in a different database: <https://proxy.nlc.alamo.edu:4443/login?url=http://atoz.ebsco.com/Search.asp?id=8525> If you still can’t find the fulltext, just [contact us](#) – we may be able to obtain the article from a different library!

## Step 7: Find & evaluate other sources (if applicable).

Other sources such as government documents, media items, and websites can sometimes be useful, depending on what type of sources your instructor allows. If non-library websites are considered acceptable, be sure to visit our [Hotlinks](#) page to check for useful free websites which cover your topic. As always, carefully evaluate the quality of all information you find!

## Step 8: Write your paper and compile your list of sources.

Avoid plagiarism by properly citing all your sources, via both your **in-text citations** and your list of **References** or **Works Cited** at the end of your paper. Any time you use someone else’s words or ideas, you **must** credit the source!