



QUICK TIPS ON KEYWORDS

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Identifying Keywords

Whether you are searching on an online database, a library catalog or the Web, the *key words* that you use to do your searching are an important element in determining how successful your search will be. Here are some ideas you might find useful:

- **Write down your thesis or the question you are trying to answer and highlight the main words. Use one or more of these words to do your search.**
Example: What were the **causes** of the **American Civil War**.
- **Think of words that have a meaning related to the terms you are using.**
Example: **American** → **United States**

Using Keywords

- **If you are getting too many items**
 - use more words, and
 - connect them with AND (or the equivalent, depending on your search tool).Example: **United States** AND **Civil War** AND **causes**
- **If you are getting too few items**
 - use less words, and/or
 - use synonyms connected with OR.Example: **Civil War** AND (**American** or **United States**)
- **If you are getting irrelevant items**
 - find one or more words that characterize those items and
 - use NOT to get rid of those items.Example: **Civil War** NOT **tourism**