What Is A Subject Term?
Subject terms describe what a work is about. Every item in a database is assigned one or more subject terms. Subject terms can help you identify effective keywords. Most databases list subjects in their search results.

Basic Search Tips

Too Many Results? Narrow your search.
1. Add Additional Keywords.
   In databases, **subject terms** can help you identify more narrow topics and keywords.
2. Choose More Narrow Search Terms.
   Examples: • Broader term: law
   • Narrower term: “environmental law”
3. Use Limiters.
   These are things like search fields (title or abstract) publication date, and format type.
4. Search For A Short Phrase With Quotation Marks.
   Examples: • “environmental law”
   • “environmental justice”

Too Few Results? Broaden Your Search
1. Choice Of Search Terms
   Choosing the right search terms is key.
   • Experiment with related terms.
   • In databases, **subject terms** can help you identify keywords.
   • Use OR to search for multiple related terms at the same time.
     (e.g. policy OR law)
2. Too Many Search Terms
   Databases can be picky about search terms. Be selective.
   • Begin with one or two search terms that best represent your topic.
     Then add other terms as needed.
   • Avoid long phrases and empty words like “the” and “how.”
3. Too Many Limiters
   If you limited the search (e.g. by date or search field), remove the limiters and reassess.
4. Narrow Topic
   For highly specific topics, you may locate sources on a broader related topic.
   Examples: • Narrow search: Bloomington Indiana AND environmental policy
   • Broader search: United States AND state government AND environmental policy
5. Database Choice
   Different databases focus on different topics. Try the “Subjects” tab on the IUB Libraries homepage to view resources for different subjects.
**More Search Tips**

**Boolean Operators**

Most library databases use Boolean operators (AND, OR, and NOT). You can use them to broaden or narrow your search results.

- **AND** searches for records that use both terms and narrows your results.
- **OR** searches for records that use either term and broadens your results.
- **NOT** excludes words from the search and narrows your results.

### Database Search Fields

Records in library databases are made of “fields.” Fields can help you narrow your search.

**Examples:**
- author
- date/year of publication
- title
- subject/descriptor
- abstract
- all text (searches the full text, if available)

### Improving Search Results With Fields

- Most databases automatically search by keyword (looking for the term anywhere in the record).
- Limit the search field for a term to narrow results.
- Fields are usually in drop down menus.
- If the database has a single search box with no drop down menu, look for an “Advanced Search” option.

### Phase Searching

Use quotation marks or parentheses around search words to search for a phrase.

**Example:** “united nations peacekeeping forces”

### Nesting

Use parentheses to put search words into sets. Terms in parentheses are processed first. Use nesting with AND, OR, and NOT.

**Example:**

- Success AND (education OR employment)

### Truncation

Broaden your search to include variant word endings and spellings. Enter the root of the word then the truncation symbol [usually an asterisk (*)].

**Example:**

- elect* = election, electoral, elections

### Wildcards

Substitute a symbol for just one character. The most commonly used wildcard symbol is a question mark (?).

**Example:**

- wom?n = woman, women