SECRET STRATEGIES FOR SERIOUS SEARCHERS

Think about your search habits! These useful strategies may be used independently or in combination with each other throughout your search process.

When you stop to think, you'll discover that a fuller bag of tricks than you first imagined!

1. IMAGINING YOUR DREAM DOCUMENT

Imagine words and phrases: Beyond the **terms** you might instinctively enter in a search box, what are the words and phrases you are likely to actually find in a truly relevant **document** of your dreams?

2. PREDICTING THE FILE TYPE

Is that dream document more likely to be a book, a pdf report or whitepaper, a film, a popular journal, a blog, a website, a presentation, etc.? After you try an initial search in a database, you can use the facets that appear to filter for type. If you are searching Google, knowing when it is best to start with **Google Books**, **Google Scholar** or **Google News**, can make all the difference.

3. PEARL GROWING

Like making a beautiful pearl from small bits of sand, this is the classic term for using one information discovery to find others. That one "killer" item might reveal leads in terms of vocabulary, subject headings, authors, journals, etc. Incorporate any finds, not in your initial strategy, into your subsequent strategies.

4. CITATION CHAINING / SNOWBALL SEARCHING

Citation chaining is the process by which you identify one solid information source, such as an article relevant to your topic, and mine its list of references for additional useful resources. Backward chaining or snowball searching is looking for the cited articles that came before the one you are examining. (Some may be critical; others may be obsolete.)

Forward chaining is locating the more recent writing of others who have cited the article. The moving backward and forward creates a chain of linked relevant literature. This is simple to do in **Google Scholar**. You can also personalize **Google Scholar** to link to articles to which the library has access.

5. JOURNAL RUN

Should a particular journal or magazine appear frequently in your results with relevant content, it likely has more to explore! In a database, it's easy and useful to scan multiple issues of the journal. Bonus: You may even discover a super-relevant theme issue.
6. LEVERAGING CONTROLLED VOCABULARY

Databases are structured around hierarchical subject terms and used an agreed-up controlled vocabulary. Some have a thesaurus for you to consult. You may discover these terms in the beginning of your articles as well as on your results list.

7. PERIPHERAL VISION: SEARCH LIKE A BIRD

Birds have a wider field of vision than humans. In addition to seeing straight ahead, they have side vision. We can train ourselves to look for surprises, not just precisely what we initially entered the search looking for. This allows us to discover unexpected terms and names and concepts and be able to incorporate these ideas into future searches.

8. BUILDING BLOCKS

After brainstorming search terms and synonyms, it helps to consider your important concepts as facets, to be iteratively combined in a variety of different ways using Boolean operators OR and AND.

9. AUTHOR SEARCHING

When you discover a particular author who regularly writes in your area of interest, you may benefit from searching the author’s other works. In addition to subscription databases, clicking on an author’s name in Google Scholar will lead to their Google Scholar Profile as well as other writings.

10. CONSULTING TRusted FRIENDS

When you have limited subject knowledge and/or a limited understanding of the vocabulary of your search, it can be best to start by consulting a few trusted friends. This can include reading introductory articles in databases, starting in reference sources or Web subject directories or the cluster topic finders that appear in many student databases. (Markey calls this “getting a little help from your friends,” p. 193-196.)

11. KNOW (AND USE) YOUR LIMITERS

Thoughtfully use those limiters format, academic/peer reviewed, subjects, publication, source type, database, etc. that appear after you hit “search”! (In Google, click on “tools.”)

SOME FINAL TIPS

Of course, there are some very useful tricks you can use across databases and some search engines, like:

- Use "Control F" for finding text within pages or documents
- Using quotes for "phrase searching"
- Using Google Advanced Search when precision matters