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# [Searching Databases with Keywords](#) (Video)

[Lehman College Library - YouTube Channel](#)

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3:13 min

## Summary

This video defines keywords and demonstrates how to develop and refine keywords for library database searches.

## Transcript

Searching a library database is most effective when you use keywords.

A keyword is a word or phrase that represents something essential about your topic. Oh, and by the way, a phrase is just a group of words that together have one meaning, like "figure of speech" or "TV dinner."

To determine keywords you usually begin by breaking your research question or topic down into its most basic parts. So let's say your research question is: does bilingualism impact the reading skills of teenagers? If you broke that sentence down into its most basic parts, your keywords might be: bilingualism, impact, reading skills, and teenagers.

But if we put that search into a library database like Academic Search Complete, we get zero results.

We need to look again at our keywords. Have we broken our topic down into its most basic parts? What if we got rid of the word impact? We should still get articles about the reading skills of bilingual teenagers, so the keyword impact may not be necessary to get useful results. When we put our new keywords: bilingualism, reading skills, and teenagers into Academic Search Complete, we do get one search result, but just one.

There's got to be more out there. Maybe we could simplify our keywords even more. What about: bilingual, reading, and teenagers? If we put these keywords into Academic Search Complete, we get more results, a total of eleven.

Usually the more simple or basic the keywords, the more results you'll get. Still, if you have searched only with those three terms, you'd quickly hit a wall. You only have 11 articles to choose from. That's why you want to think about synonyms for your keywords.

Synonyms are words or phrases that mean the same thing. There are a lot of synonyms for teenagers, and trying each one of these in the database will get you different results. You can combine all these search terms in a single box by using the word OR. That will search for all of those words, and when you do, you get many more results, 58 to be exact.

You can also expand your search results by using related terms. Related terms are linked in some way but have different or even just slightly different meanings. If you add all of these new keywords into the box with bilingualism, again using the word OR to connect them, you get even more results.

Also, pay attention to the words in the articles you find. These can give you other ideas for good keywords. That's it. Try using keywords in a database search today.