

Reading and interaction

Reading for research

For most research, you will need to use recent information from journal articles. The best way of searching journals is to use a database of abstracts and indexes. To find the information you want quickly, you need to develop an effective search strategy. This involves:

- 1 posing the search question
- 2 identifying the main topics
- 3 deciding how to search for the main topics
- 4 formulating the search query.

For example:

- 1 The search question:
What information is available on the language problems of international students at universities?
- 2 The main topics:
international students, language problems, universities
- 3 Searching for the main topics:
Databases search for information by keywords. If your topics do not match these keywords, use synonyms or variants. Some databases help you to focus your search by suggesting alternatives or more specific keywords. Here is an example.

international students
language problems
universities

foreign students
English (second language)
postgraduates, undergraduates

4 The search query:

Most databases allow you to combine your keywords using AND so the search query becomes:

foreign students AND English (second language) AND postgraduates

TASK 9

Underline the main topics in these search questions and suggest possible keywords.

- 1 What are the main kinds of disease amongst fish kept in freshwater ponds?
- 2 How are working practices affected by the introduction of computers?
- 3 What information is available on the links between exposure to asbestos and lung disease?
- 4 How has the economy of Japan changed in the last 20 years?
- 5 What were the causes of the civil war in the USA?
- 6 Which countries will suffer water shortages in the next 50 years and to what extent?
- 7 What factors cause corrosion in aluminium?
- 8 Why do girls perform better than boys in school examinations in the UK?
- 9 What are the advantages and disadvantages of GM cereal crops?
- 10 What differences are there between male and female management styles?

TASK 10

Formulate search queries for each of your search questions from Task 9.

Compare queries with your partner. Try your questions using an online database.

TASK 11

Research one of these questions or a question of your own.

Take brief notes on the information you find and report your findings to the rest of your class. Cite the references you use.

TASK 12

Which of these citations from a database search would you refer to for further information on topics a) to e) below? Compare answers with your partner.

- a) The language problems of Asian international students.
- b) The writing problems of international students.
- c) The best way to teach international students.
- d) The importance of previous learning for international students.
- e) Factors in addition to language problems which may affect international students.