

Transcript: Developing a search strategy

In this video I will talk you through the process of developing a search strategy.

This will help you to find a manageable number of relevant articles when searching for literature on your research topic.

There are two common problems you may encounter when searching for articles.

The first is finding too many.

As in this example, doing a general search in SOLO or Google Scholar is likely to bring you thousands of results.

You could never read all of them and you're unlikely to look past the first page or two.

There may be lots of great articles in there but you won't find them because the number of results is too overwhelming.

The other problem is finding too few results, or even no results at all.

This might happen if you are searching a subject-specific database with a very narrow search.

Happily, the solution to both of these problems is the same.

Developing a search strategy may sound complicated, but it's actually quite straightforward

– it means breaking up your research topic into concepts, and thinking about different ways to describe each of them.

For the rest of this video, I am going to use the example: "Bullying amongst boys in secondary schools".

The first thing to do is to identify the key concepts within your research topic or question.

In this case it is very simple – I have 3 main concepts, which are bullying, boys, and secondary schools.

You may have more or fewer than 3, that's fine.

The next thing I'm going to do is take each of my concepts one by one, and think of alternative words I could use to describe them.

I am interested in articles about bullying, but the authors of an article might have used other words instead.

For example they might have written about harassment or victimisation

They might also have looked at a particular kind of bullying, like, physical or verbal bullying

Here are some more examples.

Moving onto boys, I might be interested in articles which talk about young men, or adolescents, or teenagers.

I might also want to read studies which discuss the impact of gender in bullying

Finally, I have chosen the term secondary school in my topic, but other countries use the term high school.

I might want to narrow my search to articles about particular kinds of school, for example private, comprehensive or international schools

Or I might choose a particular age range like 11-16 year olds or key stage 3, GCSE, or A level

Doing this work before you start searching will reward you later with more relevant results.

You will also find that as you start reading articles about your topic, you pick up more useful keywords which you can add into your searching, for example, I might not have thought of cyber-bullying straight away.

Thinking of possible ways to narrow your topic can stop you getting overwhelmed by too many articles

I've chosen to display my search strategy ideas in a table, but you may prefer a more visual approach

These are some examples of other ways that you could map out your alternative keywords

It's just a case of finding what works best for you. thanks for watching.