**Keywords**

In this tutorial you will learn:

* What keywords are
* Why keywords are important
* How to choose keywords
* How to brainstorm synonyms
* How synonyms affect a search

**What are Keywords?**

Pretend you are eating a chocolate chip cookie.

As you eat the cookie, you may be thinking about how crunchy the cookie is. Or maybe that it is chewy or chocolate-y. Crunchy, chewy, and chocolate-y are all words that describe the cookie.

Keywords are words that describe your topic. Some of the words you would use to describe the cookie are included in the name of the cookie. But as you eat the cookie you discover other ways that you would describe it based on the cookie’s texture and taste.

Like the cookie, some of the words you would use to describe your topic will come from the topic itself. But you will also discover other words that can describe your topic as you begin to break it apart.

So, if your topic is “the effects of alcohol abuse on academic performance” your initial keywords would be

* alcohol,
* abuse, and
* academic performance.

Other related keywords may be

* binge drinking,
* college,
* students,
* freshmen,
* grades,
* completion, or
* retention.

**Why are keywords important?**

Okay. Keywords are good for describing your topic, but why are they important? When you type an entire sentence, question, or phrase into a search engine like Google, Google can pick out the important words. This is called a natural language search.

Even though Google can pick out keywords in a “natural language” search, you may get more relevant results by using keywords.

The Big Difference

Library databases and catalogs do not work the same way as Google. Natural language searches in library databases are rarely successful.

Library databases cannot ignore the unimportant words you include in your search. So it’s up to you to select only the most important words before you search.

**Choosing keywords**

Now let’s look at how to pull keywords out of your topic.

First, it is often helpful to write out your topic in the form of a statement of question. If you are writing about the ways that acid rain might negatively impact rainforest frogs, you might write this as a question.

How does acid rain affect frogs in the rainforest?

Now select the most important words.

**Synonyms and Related Words**

Once you have pulled out your keywords, it is helpful to brainstorm synonyms and other related words. Synonyms are words that have the same or similar meanings.

Related words don’t mean the same thing as your topic keywords but they represent related concepts. Recall our sample topic: the effect of acid rain on rainforest frogs. Some related words might be

* ozone,
* pollution,
* food chain, or
* ecology.

None of these words appear in our topic statement but they represent related concepts that could make effective keywords.

Related words can also be broader or narrower than your original topic. Broad keywords can help when you can’t find enough information. Narrow keywords can help to find more specific information when you have found way too much information. For example, cookies is a broad term, our original keyword chocolate chip cookies is narrower, and chocolate peanut butter chip cookies is the narrowest.

Try this!

Brainstorm your own keywords.

What topic are you considering?

1. Write down your topic in the form of a topic statement or research question.
2. Now write down 2-3 keywords that capture your main ideas.
3. What synonyms and related words might help?
4. Write down broader or narrower words that might be useful.

**Improving your results**

How keywords affect your results. Let’s say we’re searching for articles on body image and teens. The first time we search we use the word teens. Why not? It’s right there in our topic statement. We get 190 results. Not bad! But can we do better?

We’re still searching for articles on our topic body image and teens, but let’s go beyond the first words with think of. Now instead of teens, let’s try the synonym- adolescents. This word is more likely to be used in academic research studies. We get 616 results. There are many more articles out there than we first thought.

Related keywords and synonyms help you find articles and books you may not have discovered if you only used the first words that come to mind.

**Recap**

In this tutorial you have learned:

Why keywords are important

How to choose keywords

How to brainstorm synonyms for your keywords

How these synonyms can help you get better results

Now let’s test your understanding of these concepts.

**Quiz**- **Identifying Keywords**

The following quiz consists of 10 questions. There are multiple, true false, and sorting questions. Type the letter which matches the correct answer in the blank.

Each question is worth 10 points.

\_\_\_\_ 1. What are the best keywords for the following topic: “the effect of contagious cancers on Tasmanian Devils?”

A. contagious, cancer, Tasmanian Devils

B. contagious, Tasmanian Devils

C. Tasmanian Devils

D. contagious, cancer

\_\_\_\_ 2. Which combination of keywords best represents the topic: “how soft drinks are advertised?”

A. soft drinks, sales

B. soft drinks, television

C. soft drinks, supermarkets

D. soft drinks, marketing

\_\_\_\_ 3. Keywords are important when searching library databases because: (Select all that apply)

A. keywords help you isolate the main ideas of your topic

B. library databases work just like Google: the more you put in, the more you’ll get back

C. natural language searches don’t work well in library databases

D. keywords help you find books and articles you may not have found with one word

\_\_\_\_ 4. What is a synonym for the word “child”?

A. juvenile

B. adult

C. kitten

D. baby boomer

\_\_\_\_ 5. Broader keywords will help when your original search brings back too much information.

A. True

B. False

\_\_\_\_ 6. Please put the following keywords’ letters in descending order from broad to narrow in the blank. General words should be at the top.

A. Sports Car

B. Automobile

C. Porsche 911

D. Transportation

\_\_\_\_ 7. Which keyword is a narrower term than “sleep disturbance”?

A. sleep

B. REM sleep

C. dreaming

D. insomnia

E. mood disorder

\_\_\_\_ 8. Which keyword is a broader term than “television”?

A. advertising

B. film

C. television viewership

D. public television

E. media

\_\_\_\_ 9. Which of these related words for “dog” could be used to broaden the topic?

A. wolf

B. puppy

C. hound

D. canine

\_\_\_\_ 10. Which of these related words for “pizza” would be used to narrow the topic?

A. pepperoni pizza

B. pizza pie

C. flatbread

D. Italian food

If you are required to turn in this quiz to your professor, please print by selecting FILE => PRINT. If you are required to email the quiz to your professor or upload it to Blackboard, please choose FILE => SAVE.

Answer Key:

1. A

2. D

3. A, C, D

4. A

5. B

6. D, B, A, C

7. D

8. E

9. D

10. A