

Guidelines for creating an effective search strategy:

1. Think about your project topic as a **question** or series of questions
2. Write down one of these questions and underline the **key words** or phrase(s) e.g.

Discuss the use of 'social class' as a variable in sociolinguistics. Mention ways in which it has been used in sociolinguistic studies, factors to be careful of when using it, and typical findings.

3. Create a list of **synonyms** (alternative terms) for each word that you have underlined. Note that some key terms that are very specific to linguistics will not have obvious synonyms e.g. sociolinguistics. You may want to search for alternative phrases instead (see example below). You may also need to think quite broadly about synonyms, but not too broadly otherwise you'll start going off topic.

E.g. Social class: *social group; status; upbringing; family; culture, background; personal circumstances etc.*
Sociolinguistics: *"language and society" or "social and cultural factors"*
Sociolinguistic studies: *"sociolinguistics considerations"; research*



Tip: Use an online thesaurus (e.g. Roget's online thesaurus at <http://www.roget.org/>) or the thesaurus in Word to come up with a range of synonyms. There are also excellent online dictionaries in the reference section of the library's e-resources gateway: MetaLib. Look for the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online in the Linguistics section: <http://metalib.york.ac.uk/>.

4. Consider using **truncation** or **wildcard** symbols to increase the number of matching terms when using the search function of an electronic information resource:
 - The truncation symbol (often * or \$) to search for variant endings of a word stem:
e.g. **soci*** matches **society, social, sociology etc.**
 - The wildcard symbol (often ?) to replace any single letter:
e.g. **organi?ation** finds **organisation** or **organization**.
5. Combine your search terms using **OR** or **AND** whereby:
OR finds references which contain either term, e.g. **impact OR effect**
(This *expands* the search)
AND finds references which contain both terms, e.g. **language AND society**
(This *narrows* the search)

You can put all your search terms into one search string; however this may not always bring up a full set of results. Sometimes it is helpful to break the searches down into two or three essential keywords to begin with.

Example:

Question:

Discuss the use of 'social class' as a variable in sociolinguistics. Mention ways in which it has been used in sociolinguistic studies, factors to be careful of when using it, and typical findings.

Keywords:

“social class”		variable		sociolinguistics
OR “social group” OR background OR culture	AND		AND	OR “language and society”

[Remember that you can search for particular phrases by putting “ ” around the phrase.]

It is useful to devise a search strategy before you launch into searching the library catalogue or databases and you will find that your search strategy continues to develop throughout your research. Keep a note of new keywords and synonyms as you go along.

So, now that you have identified what information you need and devised a search strategy for finding that information, it's time to **start researching...**

The screenshot shows a ProQuest record for 'Social Class'. The title is 'Social Class' by Ash, Sharon. The record includes a citation, a 'Find it' button, and an abstract. The abstract discusses the use of 'social class' as a variable in sociolinguistic studies. Below the abstract, there is an 'Indexing (details)' section with a 'Cite' button. The 'Subject' section lists related terms like 'Variationist Linguistics' and 'Social Class'. The 'Classification' section shows '5612: sociolinguistics; language usage'. The 'Identifier / keyword' is 'bookitem'. The 'Supplemental data' section shows 'Edition date: 2002'. The 'Title' is 'Social Class'.