

Methods for Approaching Research

The purpose of this activity is to learn how to:

- Develop a research topic/question
- Refine your research topic/question
- Develop a literature search, or research, strategy.

Activity 1 - Initial Research Topic

→ Take a minute and write down your initial research topic thoughts and ideas.



1. .
2. .
3. .
4. .
5. .
6. .
7. .
8. .
9. .
10. .

→ Next, answer the following questions:

A. What do you know about your research topic?

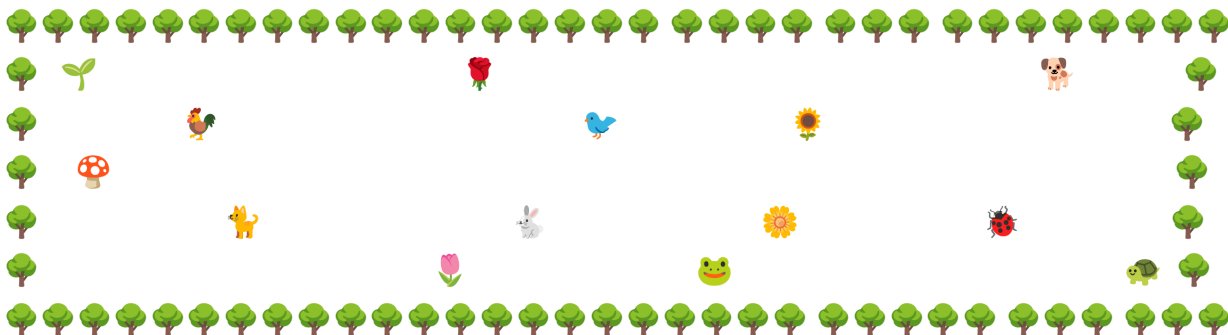
1. .
2. .
3. .
4. .

5. .
6. .
7. .
8. .
9. .
10. .

B. What do you **not** know about your research topic?

1. .
2. .
3. .
4. .
5. .
6. .
7. .
8. .
9. .

Cursor Park (click to place your cursor below when you are finished with the above)



Activity 2 - Refining your topic IS research.

Reference resources such as dictionaries and encyclopedias can help you narrow your research topic, and gather related keywords and phrases. A few strategies for finding related descriptive keywords can include:

- Open web searches (i.e. Google, Bing, etc.)
- Dictionaries and encyclopedias (via [the library catalog](#) or as listed on the [GES 367 course guide](#))
- Library databases (via the [library A-Z database list](#) or as listed on the [GES 367 course guide](#))
- Subject headings and keyword searches (via [the library catalog](#))

→ Locate additional descriptive keywords and phrases using reference resources, and list them below. Pay particular attention to identifying both broad and narrow keywords and phrases for your research topic.

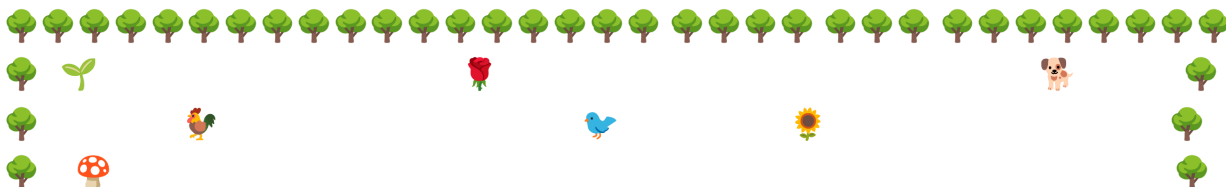
For example, a “Dog” is a broad keyword, while “German Shepherd” is more specific and narrow.

1. .
2. .
3. .
4. .
5. .
6. .
7. .
8. .
9. .
10. .



→ Look at someone else’s topic and keywords above, and add one or two additional keywords or phrases they could use.

Cursor Park (click to place your cursor below when you are finished with the above)





Activity 3 - Refine your topic

Answering “who, what, when, where, how, and why” will help you turn your research topic into a research question. This may also help you identify gaps in what you know, so feel free to revisit Activity 1 and 2 as needed (remember: research is an iterative process!).

→ Fill out the table below with keywords from your research topic/question.

	Who	What	When	Where
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

Activity 4 - Ask the question...

Can you revise and refine your research topic into a question based on your work completed in Activities 1-3? If you already had a research question, can you narrow or broaden it to make it more well-defined and answerable?

→ Try to write a well-defined, specific, and answerable research question.

1. .

2. .

3. .

4. .

5. .

6. .

7. .

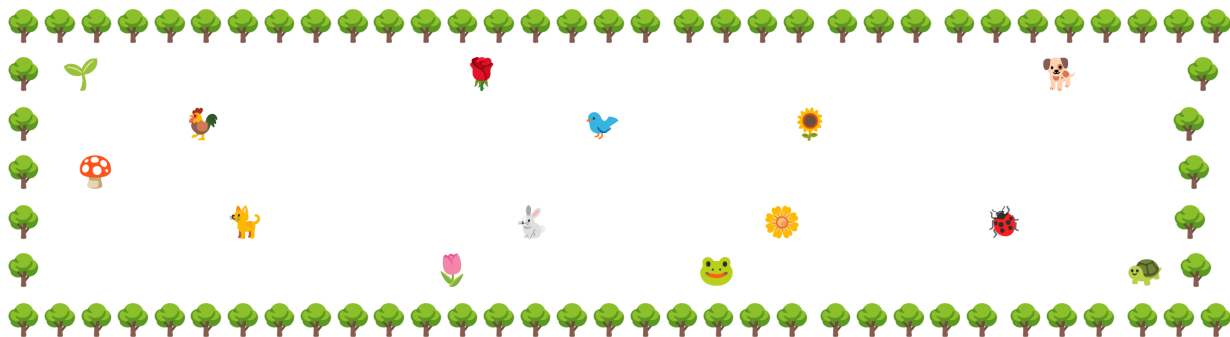
8. .

9. .

10. .



Cursor Park (click to place your cursor below when you are finished with the above)



→ Now try searching using your question in the [library catalog](#):



Research Strategies

Activity 1 - Search terms

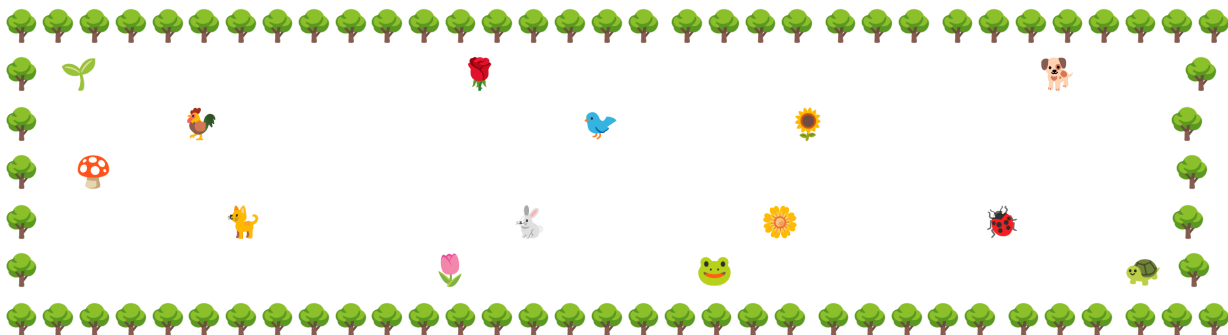
→ Paste your research question below, then cross out words that are not important to your search (and, the, or, etc.):

1. .
2. .
3. .
4. .
5. .
6. .
7. .
8. .
9. .
10. .

What do we call the remaining words?

Why do we need them?

Cursor Park (click to place your cursor below when you are finished with the above)



→ Now try searching using these words in the [library catalog](#):



Finding Academic Research: An Iterative Process



Using the advanced search feature can make it easier to add several keywords to your search:

Advanced Search

Operator	Search Index	Search Term
	Keyword	
AND	Title	
AND	Author	

[Add row](#)

[Clear](#) [Search](#)

What if my results aren't useful?

Activity 2 - Refining your search

Start by finding more keywords. What are some places where you can find more keywords?

Activity 3 - Developing Your Search Strategy

Think about potential search combinations to try with your keywords. Most library databases cannot interpret natural language, so instead you will want to use permutations of your keywords, operators (e.g. AND, OR, NOT), and perhaps even specialized symbols (e.g. *, “ ”).

AND – combines search terms.

OR – broadens a search. Results will match at least one of the terms.

NOT – excludes a term from a search.

Quotes (“ ”) – A symbol commonly used for matching a phrase.

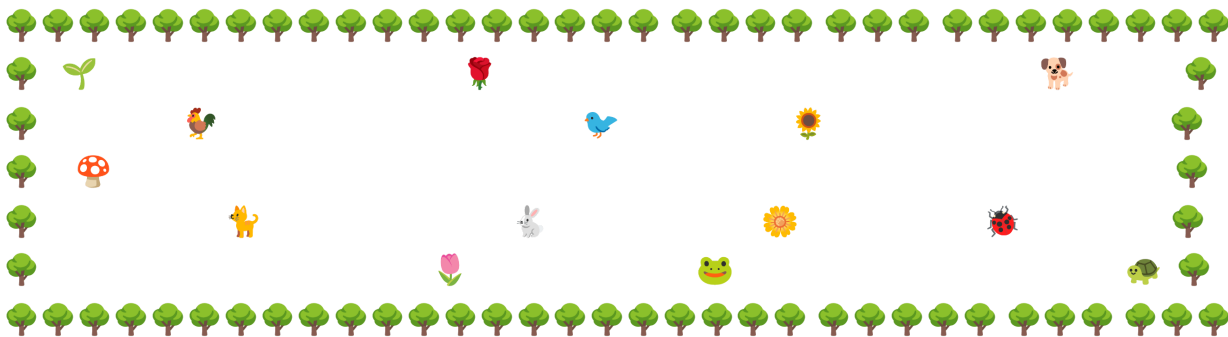
Truncation (*) – symbol commonly used for matching related words with different endings (e.g. vacci* will include vaccinate, vaccinates, vaccine, vaccines, vaccination, vaccinations and vaccinating).

→ List three keywords, using the operators above (for example, “environmentally friendly” AND “household cleaners” OR bleach).

1. .
- 2.
3. .
4. .

5. .
6. .
7. .
8. .
9. .
10. .

Cursor Park (click to place your cursor below when you are finished with the above)



Additional Strategies

1. Try using different databases.

Since the library catalog searches through all of our databases, it may help to search within the databases themselves to get more relevant results.

How do you pick a database that is relevant to your topic?

Access Online

	Publication	Database / Coverage
View full text	Plant Ecology	JSTOR Life Sciences Collection
View full text	Plant Ecology	Environment Complete
View full text	Plant Ecology	ProQuest Central
View full text	Plant Ecology	ProQuest Biology Database
View full text	Plant Ecology	Springer Complete Journals

2. Use filters.

Don't forget to use the filters to limit your search results to items you can use.

All Formats

- ☒ All Formats
- ☐ Article, Chapter (644)
 - ☐ Article (623)
 - ☐ Chapter (20)
 - ☐ Downloadable Article (1)
- ☐ Book (13)
 - ☐ Thesis, Dissertation (8)
 - ☐ eBook (3)
 - ☐ Print Book (3)
- ☐ Archival Material (3)
 - ☐ Downloadable Archival Material (3)
- ☐ Video (1)
 - ☐ VHS Video (1)

Year

- ☒ All Years
- ☐ Last 5 Years
- ☐ Last 10 Years
- ☐ Last 25 Years
- ☐ Custom Year Range:
from through

Change Year

3. Contact a librarian. We are here to help!

Check out the course guide for this class at: uncg.libguides.com/ges367

And don't forget you can get help:

- At the reference desk in the library
- Via the [library chat](#)
- By [emailing](#) or [scheduling a meeting](#) with Jo!

