

Activity: Refining Search Results

In this activity, you'll practice making decisions to improve your search results and minimize information overload.

First, select a topic. Perform a broad search (Search #1) on your topic and describe the results in terms of their number and relevance. Next, adjust your search string with the goal of refining your search results. Describe the results of this search (Search #2). Finally, based on the results of Search #2, suggest at least two additional changes that would be likely to produce a more useful set of search results.

Your response should include:

- The topic of your search
- The exact search string you used for your first search
- One paragraph describing your initial search results in terms of number and relevance
- The exact search string you used for your second search
- One paragraph explaining how you changed your search in response to the first set of search results, and why you made this choice

Sample response

I decided to look for information on the role of First Ladies in the United States White House in the 20th century. I chose the JSTOR database because it has lots of sources that focus on history. For my first search, I used the search string women white house. This search produced almost 200,000 results. As I scanned the first few pages of results, I noticed that although most of them related to the White House, many were talking about personnel, security, or other issues that didn't relate directly to my topic. Based on these observations, I changed my search string to first ladies white house. I thought that this would help to focus my search on the First Ladies specifically, instead of many other areas where women might be involved in the White House. I was surprised to see that this search string brought back even more results, over 450,000. However, when I sorted the results by relevance, many of them talked about the First Ladies, so I could tell that this was a better search term than the broader word "women." There were also a surprising number of articles about First Ladies' dresses and fashion, which isn't relevant to my topic.