You Need Keywords

Video Transcript

Researching in academic databases can be more complicated than searching the internet.

That's because databases of academic journal articles don't have billions of dollars invested in their algorithm, and so they don't always work as smoothly as Google.

Neither does the library's catalog.

When you search in an academic database or the library catalog, the results you get only return exactly what you type into the search bar.

If you type in "killer whale", it won't necessarily return results for orca.

You have to search for both.

The words that you type into the search bar are called keywords, and knowing the right keywords is essential for effective academic research.

For example, say you wanted to write a research paper about people in the 19th century who lived outside of the gender binary.

You might think to search for "nonbinary", since that is a word most people currently use to describe themselves.

However, the language we use now to describe marginalized groups of people is often not the same language that was used in the past. And even contemporary academic writing does not necessarily use the same language that communities use about themselves.

Searching nonbinary gets you 14 results.

To find more books on this topic, you also need to search for related keywords like transgender or intersex.

Before you start searching, it can help to make a list of all the different synonyms and related words for your research topic, and then run multiple searches to see what gives you the best results.

When you find a book you like, check out the subject terms at the bottom of the page.

These words are assigned by the Library of Congress to describe what a book is about.

Even though many contemporary genderqueer people would not use the words transsexualism or transvestism to describe themselves, these words were once the terminology applied to books about nonbinary people.

You can click on these subject terms to find more related content.

Add these words to your list of keywords so that you can search other databases.

If you are struggling, contact a librarian and we can help you figure out the best keywords to use.