

## Developing an Effective Search Strategy for SWAN Library Catalog

### SAMPLE TOPIC: SUICIDE ASSESSMENT

- Searched key concept terms as subject but found no relevant heading  
SUBJECT = suicide assessment
- Searched same key concept terms as keyword  
WORD = "suicide assessment"  
Alternate search: WORD = suicide and assessment
- Looked at a few records; found the following relevant subject headings  
Suicide – Prevention (found most often but may be too broad)  
Suicidal behavior – Prevention (very narrow)  
Suicide – Risk factors  
Risk assessment (found this one later but wasn't used very often)
- Tried the following search strategies (using View Entire Collection)

#### **#1 Searched one subject heading at a time**

SUBJECT = suicide -- prevention (121 entries found)

SUBJECT = suicidal behavior prevention (2 entries found)

SUBJECT = suicide -- risk factors (11 entries found)

#### **#2 Combined 2 best subject headings together**

WORD = "suicide prevention" and "suicide risk factors"  
(9 entries found)

#### **#3 Wanted to try one more search since I'm not retrieving enough about risk or assessment. So will use keyword search for truncated subject heading and combine with new keywords. I like this search the best.**

WORD = s:suicid\* and (risk or assess\*) (72 entries found)

Note: Searching the term **suicid\*** as a subject word (s:) will catch all relevant subject terms beginning with suicide or suicidal. The term **risk** will catch the subjects -- risk assessment and risk factors. Truncating risk doesn't really help me. The term **assess\*** will catch any free text keywords (assess, assessment, assessing).

## Searching Best Practices

- There is never only one best search strategy. Searching is not an exact science. The Library's goal is NOT to make you an expert searcher but to give you skills that will help you create effective searches down the road.
- A best search strategy is not equal to a search with the fewest entries.
- A search with a few relevant entries with an ineffective or lazy search is not the same thing as a "good" search strategy. An example of a lazy search is searching keyword terms limited to the title field when you should be searching records by subject or by keyword.
- If you mean to search keywords as a phrase, then put quote marks around it. You'll retrieve fewer and more relevant entries that way.
- Restating a topic as a search is NOT an effective search strategy.  
Topic: Generalized anxiety disorder in adult females  
Keyword or Subject Search: ~~Generalized anxiety disorder in adult females~~  
NO!
- After you do each search, scan your search results and ask are the titles relevant? If you can't tell, then, retrieve a few records and scan the abstracts. Do I need to revise my search again? Have I gotten new ideas for additional search terms or different ways to combine my terms? If so, do more searches.
- Don't spin your wheels endlessly if you feel you are in a rut when you are researching on your own. Ask for help.