



## Keywords and Subject Headings

*It does matter which you use!*

### What's the difference?

#### Keywords

Keywords are words that you think of on your own. When you say "I'm writing a paper about censorship in the film industry", your keywords are "censorship" and "film". It's useful to brainstorm for synonyms to your keywords. For this sample search, some synonyms that you may want to consider using are "banned", "free speech", "movies", and "cinema". Can you think of any more?



#### Subject headings

Subject headings are subjects chosen from a list of officially acceptable subjects used by a database (see the next section for a description of a database). Each database has its *own* list of official subject headings. For example, our library catalog's subject heading for films is "motion pictures" but in Ethnic NewsWatch the subject heading is "entertainment (movies)". Knowing about subject headings saves time because it guarantees you'll find relevant articles or books. The trick to using subject headings is making sure that you use *official* subjects for the database you're searching.



### How does this affect your searches?

Each periodical index and library catalog is a "database". A database is a collection of "records". Records are bundles of information contained in "fields". Fields are sections of records organized and labeled according to the information found in that section. Below is a sample record with each field's label in bold.

**Title:** Disney Discusses Buying All of Infoseek.

**Author:** Orwall, Bruce; Swisher, Kara

**Source:** *Wall Street Journal* -- Eastern Edition, 06/08/99, Vol. 233 Issue 110, pA3, 0p, 1bw

**Subjects:** Consolidation & merger of corporations; Infoseek Corp.; Winebaum, Jake; Walt Disney Co.

**Abstract:** Reports on the negotiations between Infoseek Corp. and Walt Disney Co. regarding the latter's intent to consolidate ownership of Infoseek. Details on the resignation of Jake Winebaum, chief architect of Disney's Internet strategy; Cost of the acquisition of Infoseek; Plan of Disney upon acquisition of Infoseek.

#### Keywords

When you perform keyword searches, databases look for your search terms in any field in all of its records. So, a keyword search would look for your search terms anywhere in the record above. I'm writing a paper about Walt Disney and I'm looking for biographical information about Mr. Disney, not information about the Disney company. I start my research by doing a keyword search in EBSCOhost using the keyword phrase "Walt Disney". This search finds 3934 articles, including the one above. In the record above, the phrase "Walt Disney" appears in two fields (the **Subjects** field and the **Abstract** field) and both times it is part of the phrase "Walt Disney Co."

#### Subject headings

When you perform subject heading searches, databases look for your terms *only* in the **Subjects** field. When I do a subject heading search for the keyword phrase "Walt Disney" I find 2183 articles and they still include the one above because that phrase appears in the **Subjects** field. Because I want articles about the man rather than the company, I keep looking through more of the articles. I eventually find one that has a subject heading "Disney, Walt" which appears to be a subject heading for the person. By clicking on that subject heading, EBSCOhost runs a new search for articles with the "Disney, Walt" subject heading. EBSCOhost finds only 26 articles, but *every* one of them was about the person rather than the company. Below is a sample article from that new subject heading search.

**Title:** Doctor Walt and Mr Disney.

**Authors:** Rigby, Rhymer



**Source:** *Management Today*, Oct97, p136, 5/6p, 1c

**Subjects:** Disney, Walt; Mickey Mouse (Fictitious character); Animators -- Biography

**Abstract:** Profiles Walter Elias Disney, creator of the Disney World character Mickey Mouse. Background information on Disney; Reference to Disney's animated film 'Snow White.'

## Which should you use?

Each type of search has advantages and disadvantages, so your decision will vary depending on your topic and the results of your initial search.

Keywords	With keyword searches, you are likely to find <b>more articles or books</b> because the computer is searching through more information (all fields). For the search above, my keyword search for "Walt Disney" found 3934 articles. However, with keyword searches you will find that many of these articles are <b>less relevant</b> to your search. As the first example above illustrates, 3908 of those were not what I needed.	
Subject headings	Subject heading searches usually find <b>fewer articles or books</b> , but they will be <b>more relevant</b> to the subject you're searching for. My search above for "Disney, Walt" found only 26 articles, but they were <i>all</i> exactly what I was looking for.	

The moral of the story is that each kind of searching is appropriate at different times and for different searches. If one search technique doesn't give you the results you expect, try another. If you try a subject heading search first but you don't find enough, try a keyword search. If you try a keyword search but find too much that isn't quite what you were looking for, try a subject heading search. Library faculty at the Reference desks can help you decide which kind of search to use and can help you find useful subject headings for your topics.

## Index keyword searches

When you search for articles using indexes (like ProQuest Direct and EBSCOhost), most perform keyword searches by default. That means that if you type words into the search boxes, the index will automatically do a keyword search.

## Index subject heading searches

Each index has different steps you should follow when you want to do subject heading searches. Check the online help of each index or ask library faculty at the Reference Desks for assistance.

To do subject heading searches in either ProQuest Direct or EBSCOhost, you must first click on "Advanced Searching". In Advanced Searching, you will see lists of fields that you can tell the database to search. In ProQuest Direct the default is "Basic Fields" (a keyword search of all fields), but you can change this to a subject heading search by selecting "Subject". In EBSCOhost the default is "All Fields" (a keyword search of all fields), but you can change this to a subject heading search by selecting "SU Subject".

## Library catalog keyword searches

### Keyword Anywhere

Type your search terms in the "Search for" box and make sure the "Keyword Anywhere" option in the "Choose Type of Search" box is highlighted. The computer will search for your keywords anywhere in all item records. (See "Reading your search results" for more information on records.)

### Boolean Keyword

Boolean searching allows you to indicate relationships between search terms by connecting them with the words AND, OR, and NOT. See our handout *Boolean Logic* for more details.

When you select the "Boolean Keyword" option in the "Choose Type of Search" box, the computer will search for your keywords anywhere in all item records. For example, to search for films and censorship, type **films and censorship**. To find phrases, enclose the phrase in quotes. For example, "**gun control**".

## Library catalog subject heading searches

To do Subject Heading searches, select the "Subject Browse" option in the "Choose Type of Search" box, then type the official Library of Congress Subject Heading in the "Search for" box. Subjects in our library catalog are assigned from the list of official Library of Congress Subject Headings.

If you aren't sure which Library of Congress Subject Heading to use for your topic, start with a keyword search. When you find a book on your topic, look in the Subject Heading field and click on a subject heading that describes what you're looking for. The computer then searches for all books with that subject heading.