

### General Search Tips

1. Take a moment to analyze the problem:
  - A. What information is being requested? What other information would be useful?
  - B. What type of information is needed? A picture or diagram? Statistics? A definition? A how to?
  - C. Who is the information for? A 4<sup>th</sup> grader? An expert? A well-informed layman?
  - D. How much information is needed? One number? A page or two? Everything on the subject?
  - E. What sort of vocabulary is likely to appear in a discussion of the topic? Consider:
    - 1) Level of formality  
Ex: cop → police officer → law enforcement
    - 2) Technicality  
Ex: heart attack → myocardial infarction
    - 3) Terms that may appear in answer  
Ex: per lb., net, median
2. Verify: Check spellings, definitions of terms, dates, any references
3. Choose a starting place:
  - A. Ask yourself, “Who would need to know this, or have a vested interest in this subject?” A trade association, an expert, a government department might have the answers you need.
  - B. If you have a fairly specific topic, try a search in a search engine.
  - C. If you’re looking for an overview, try an encyclopedia, or Wikipedia, or a subject directory such as NebraskaAccess.
  - D. If you’re looking for a particular format, use a tool that will find it for you:
    - 1) search Google Images or Flickr for pictures
    - 2) search WorldCat or Books In Print or Amazon for a book
    - 3) to find a statistic, check the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, or a directory such as FedStats.gov.
4. Don’t bog down in a strategy that isn’t working – “3 strikes rule”
5. Remain open to the material. Learn as you go, and let what you learn help guide you.
6. Tailor your search strategy to the tool. For instance, in Google, you are searching a very large pool of all kinds of information, in fulltext, and in many cases you are searching everyday language. Contrast that with searching ERIC, a database that is heavily indexed with a specialized vocabulary, and contains summaries of contents but not fulltext documents.
7. Realize that your information search is likely to be a multi-stage process, using more than one resource, and more than one kind of resource. You may find it helpful to keep track of what you have searched where.

