Advanced Search Strategies

This video will help you locate information using advanced searching. One technique we recommend is using subject headings. Simply put, subject headings are standardized terms or phrases that are assigned to a publication and used to describe the contents of that publication.

Basically, the emperors of the databases, or the people that nobody wanted to dance with in high school, sit in a room and decide what an article is about. They tag articles under specific categories. The process is like the way digital music is organized, under headings like country, pop, or reggae. The same goes for articles, if they're on the topic of assessment and literacy skills, they will be tagged under those subjects. Subject headings also apply to books, and people.

Here's how you find em. To find subject terms in databases, look for a link labeled thesaurus, subject terms, or just plain subjects. These tools will help you identify the appropriate subject terms. You'd want to use this because the words you use to describe your perfect article may be completely different from what the database uses. The nerds who decide what subject headings go with your topic might have categorized it under something that you haven't thought of. Did I say nerds? Oh, oops. I meant database experts.

For example, I need information about colds.

Do you mean the common cold? The temperature? Or the song Cold as Ice by Foreigner?

I want more about the common cold. Well, if you enter cold in the subject terms, you find the word the database would prefer you to use. In this case, the database says to use cold (disease). First of all, eww. Second, now you have the option to use this term to find articles that only refer to the common cold Searching with subjects will not give you more results, but it will give you more targeted results.