

Why should I  
plan?

Search strategies

Choosing a  
database

Accessing a  
database

Evaluate your  
search

Modify your  
search

## Why should I plan?

- To save time
- To locate accurate information (cases, legislation and journal articles)
- To locate current information (cases, legislation and journal articles)

The UOW Library subscribes to hundreds of databases. Law databases contain a variety of information types: cases, case citators, legislation, encyclopedias, journal articles and other commentary.

To retrieve material on your topic you will need to be clear about

- the words you type into the database (keywords)
- which connectors you will use to join these words (search strategy)
- which databases to target

**Activity 1:** A Legal Research Strategy worksheet is provided here to help you plan your research. A completed worksheet with a sample topic is also included to guide you. [Print a copy of these worksheets](#) (PDF - opens in a new window).

[Identifying keywords](#) ►

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# Search strategies - identifying keywords

## 1. Write down your topic

"Discuss the legal issues of native title with particular reference to native title rights and interests. Refer to relevant legislation such as the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) and relevant case law such as the Yorta Yorta case."

## 2. Identify your search terms (keywords & phrases)

Underline the important words. The four main words and phrases from our topic are:

- **Native title**
- **Native title rights and interests**
- **Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)**
- **Yorta**

Keywords, also known as search terms, can include single words or **phrases**. For example: "native title" is a phrase. The database looks for this exact sequence of words. Phrases are often, but not always, encased in quotation marks to indicate it is a phrase. See search tips, or Help, within each database for further

information.

Search terms can also include **case names** or **sections of an act**. For example, if we want to find information on the case *Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v State of Victoria*, a search term could be: *Yorta*.

A further example would be if we want to find information on Section 223 of the *Native Title Act 1993*, a search term could be *s 223* and *native title*.

See search tips within each database for details on searching by section number.

[Alternative keywords](#) ►

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## Search strategies - alternative keywords

Given that computers search for the words you type in rather than concepts, think of different ways a particular concept may be described. Consider using

- **synonyms**
- **plurals**
- **acronyms and complete terms**
- **alternative spellings** - important when using databases that contain American terms or spelling. E.g. legalise / legalize

Keywords...	Alternative example...	How is it alternative? ...
native	Aboriginal / indigenous people	Synonym
aborigine	aborigines	Plural
legalise	legalize	Spelling variation
native title	land rights	Related
"native title rights and	<i>S 223 Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)</i>	Related

interests"		
OIPC	Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination	Acronym and complete term

[Connectors](#) ►

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## Search strategies - connectors

All databases allow you to combine your search terms, using the Boolean connectors **AND,OR** and **NOT**.

### Combining terms with AND



- Searches for records containing all of your search terms
- Narrows your searching
- Makes your search more specific
- Eg. native title and yorta

### Combining terms with OR



- Searches for records containing either of your terms

- Useful way of combining alternative terms and synonyms in order to retrieve the most records
- Useful way of combining acronyms and complete terms in order to retrieve the broadest range of records
- Eg. native title or land rights

## Combining terms with NOT



- Is the exclusion of a term
- Use with caution as it can exclude useful records  
E.g. native title NOT land rights

[Truncation](#) ►

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## Search strategies - truncation

Another technique used to broaden a search and to find all the variations of a word ending is truncation.

For example **Aborigin\*** will retrieve records with the words

aborigine

OR

aborigines

OR

aboriginal

OR

aboriginals

The truncation symbol may differ between databases. Click **Help** within each database to find what symbol is used OR use the [Library Databases tips guide](#) (Opens in a new window)

Compare your search strategy with the one below

Concept		Concept		Concept
"native title"	AND	interest*	AND	yorta
OR				
"land rights"				

Your search strategy may differ from ours. You may need to construct alternate search strategies to ensure you retrieve a manageable amount of relevant

information.

[Choosing a database](#) ►

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## Choosing a database

Now we have planned a search strategy, we need to choose an appropriate database to perform our search.

### Factors that will influence your choice of database:

- **Jurisdictional coverage** - Databases may vary in their jurisdictional focus. Some databases cover only one or two countries.
- **Subject coverage** - Some legal databases confine their coverage to journals on specific subject areas; e.g. the Australian Criminology Database (CINCH) provides coverage on crime and criminal justice. Other law databases will index journals on all aspects of law; e.g. AGIS Plus Text, Lexis.com.
- **Time period coverage** - Databases frequently cover only information from the late 1970s to the present. If you need information prior to this period, consult print indexes.

### Activity

- View **key databases** in the [Law Guide](#) (opens in a new window)

- Familiarise yourself with **all** the [Law Databases](#) (opens in a new window) to which the Library subscribes.

[Accessing a database](#) ►

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## Accessing a database

When accessing a database, you may need to verify that you are a UOW member through a Login screen (see below)

**Log in to access University of Wollongong Library electronic resources**

Access is limited to UOW students and staff. [\[Why do I need to log in?\]](#)

- Students: use your SOLS username/password
- Staff: use your staff username/password

Username:

Password:

Some databases require additional passwords to access - see list of [database passwords](#) (login required).

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# Evaluate your search for relevance and quality

Depending on your evaluation, you may need to revise or modify your search strategy.

## Some evaluation criteria:

**Relevance** - Is the information relevant to your topic, question or purpose?

**Quantity** - Are you finding enough information? Are you finding too much or too little?

**Quality** - Is the information from reputable sources?

**Timeliness** - Is the information up-to-date? Does it cover the desired time period?

**Scope** - Is the information comprehensive? Is it too narrow or too broad?

[Modify your search](#) ►

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## Modify your search

Once you have performed a search, you may need to modify your search keywords if too many or too few results have been retrieved.

### Too many results

- Add more terms to narrow your search and be more specific
- Consider using *narrower* terms (e.g. instead of *discrimination*, try *racial discrimination*)
- Consider phrase searching (often by putting the phrase in quotation marks e.g. "native title")
- Tip: searching a specific case by a party's name can reduce the number of results returned (e.g. search for *Yorta Yorta* instead of *native title*).

### Too few results

- Add alternative terms if needed
- Consider using broader terms (e.g. instead of *racial discrimination*, try *discrimination*)
- Check spelling, typing errors and variations
- Consider truncation if not already used

## Visual summary



This completes the Planning your research module.

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