

# KEYWORD VS. SUBJECT SEARCHING

## Keyword & Subject Searching: Basic Differences

### KEYWORD SEARCHING

Looks for words in ANY field within the databases' records (TITLE, AUTHOR, SUBJECT/DESCRIPTOR, and more)

- Searches using normal, everyday words (prozac, not fluoxetine)
- Search box may call this a WORD(S) ANYWHERE search
- Typically broadens a search
- Good with emerging or technical topics (influenza or helix-loop-helix motifs)
- Often finds results that use your search term in a different way than you had intended (banking used in reference to airplanes, not finance)
- Variant spellings and synonyms a problem in searching because a keyword search will only find records using exactly the word(s) you searched (woman will not find women, teenagers will not find adolescents)

### SUBJECT SEARCHING

Looks for words ONLY IN the SUBJECT/DESCRIPTOR field

- Searches using words assigned to the topic by "experts" in the subject area or database construction (fluoxetine, not prozac)
- Also known as CONTROLLED VOCABULARY or DESCRIPTOR searches
- Typically narrows a search
- Good with multi-faceted topics (World War, 1939-1945 Aerial operations, American Fiction)
- Finds only results on the topic searched (separate listings for nobility=royalty and nobility of character)
- Can be difficult to find the "right" subject heading/descriptor for your topic (Is it sea mammals, or marine mammals?)
- NOTE: Each database can use its own subject headings and descriptors

## Strategies for Effective Keyword & Subject Searching

1. Begin with a keyword search for items on your topic. **Be sure to put quotation marks around exact phrases** ("animal rights"). See if this search finds even one result that closely matches what you are looking for—for example, "japanese internment"

Num	Mark	WORDS (1-2 of 2)	Year
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Captured: the Japanese internment of American civilians in the Philippines, 1941-1945 / Frances B. Cogan</a> , <b>Book Stacks</b> ; D805.P6 C63 2000	2000
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">I am an American: a true story of Japanese internment / by Jerry Stanley</a> , <b>Juvenile Stacks</b> ; D769.8.A6 S73 1994	1994

Both these books use the word "japanese internment" in their title—but in very different senses. This is one of the problems of keyword searching! The first book is talking about American citizens taken prisoner by the Japanese during World War II, while the second book talks about American citizens or residents of Japanese ancestry who were placed in internment camps by the U.S. government during World War II.

2. Open the record for the results that match your topic. Each record will contain a listing of the subject headings given to the information resource described in that record.

These subject headings can help you construct a much more precise search—as in this example, where there are separate subject headings to describe:

- ▶ World War, 1939-1945 -- Prisoners and prisons, Japanese
- ▶ Japanese Americans -- Evacuation and relocation, 1942-1945

Author [Cogan, Frances B](#)  
 Title **Captured : the Japanese internment of American civilians in the Philippines, 1941-1945 / Frances B. Cogan**  
 Publ. info. Athens, Ga. : University of Georgia Press, c2000

LOCATION	CALL NO.	STATUS
<a href="#">Book Stacks</a>	<a href="#">D805.P6 C63 2000</a>	ON THE SHELF

Descript xi, 357 p., [8] p. of plates : ill. ; 24 cm  
 Subject [World War, 1939-1945 -- Prisoners and prisons, Japanese](#)  
[World War, 1939-1945 -- Concentration camps -- Philippines](#)  
[Prisoners of war -- United States -- History -- 20th century](#)

Note Includes bibliographical references (p. 337-346) and index

Author [Stanley, Jerry, 1941-](#)  
 Title **I am an American : a true story of Japanese internment / by Jerry Stanley**  
 Publ. info. New York : Crown Publishers, c1994

LOCATION	CALL NO.	STATUS
<a href="#">Juvenile Stacks</a>	<a href="#">D769.8.A6 S73 1994</a>	ON THE SHELF


Edition 1st ed  
 Descript 102 p. : ill., maps ; 25 cm  
 Subject [Japanese Americans -- Evacuation and relocation, 1942-1945 -- Juvenile literature](#)  
[World War, 1939-1945 -- Concentration camps -- United States -- Juvenile literature](#)  
[World War, 1939-1945 -- United States -- Juvenile literature](#)  
[United States -- Ethnic relations -- Juvenile literature](#)

Note Includes bibliographical references (p. [95]-97) and index

3. Watch for spelling when doing keyword searches. Sometimes you find few results because you are finding only those pages whose misspelling(s) match your own.

In the example below, finding only 5 results for a search about “chemistry” seems kind of odd—until you realize that you’ve misspelled chemistry and found only those records that also had chemsistry.

Keyword search (in entire article content): chemsistry

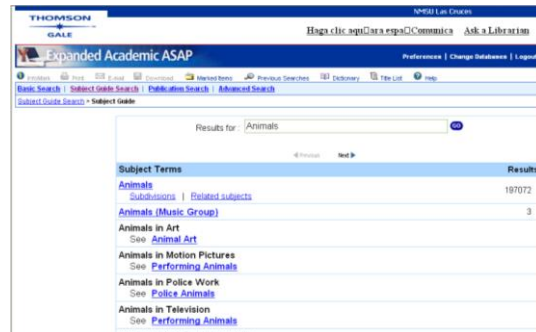
[Click here](#) to search  for additional results from image search.

Citations 1 to 5

- Mark all items on this page
- [Napoleon's Buttons: How 17 Molecules Changed History. \(Nonfiction\).](#)  
 Mark (Book Review)\_ (book review)  
*Kirkus Reviews* March 1, 2003 v71 i5 p363(2) (322 words)  
[Text](#) | [Search for Full-Text](#)
- [MENTAL GYMNASTICS.](#) (neurobics) John McCrone.  
 Mark *New Scientist* Oct 27, 2001 v172 i2314 p30 (2682 words)  
[Text](#) | [Search for Full-Text](#)

4. When possible, do a broad subject search (animals) and then browse resulting lists of subject sub-headings to see what the options are.

#	Titles	Headings	Headings Type
1	2	<a href="#">Animals.</a>	NASA thesaurus
<a href="#">See also</a> 2	24	<a href="#">Animals</a>	LC subject headings
<a href="#">See also</a> 3	7	<a href="#">Animals Abnormalities</a>	LC subject headings
4	1	<a href="#">Animals Abnormalities Congresses.</a>	LC subject headings
<a href="#">See also</a> 5	0	<a href="#">Animals Abuse of</a>	LC subject headings
6	2	<a href="#">Animals Adaptation Simulation methods Congresses.</a>	LC subject headings
<a href="#">See also</a> 7	0	<a href="#">Animals Age determination</a>	LC subject headings
<a href="#">See also</a> 8	0	<a href="#">Animals Aggressive behavior</a>	LC subject headings
<a href="#">See also</a> 9	0	<a href="#">Animals Agonistic behavior</a>	LC subject headings
10	1	<a href="#">Animals America Folklore.</a>	LC subject headings
<a href="#">See also</a> 11	0	<a href="#">Animals Anatomy</a>	LC subject headings
<a href="#">See also</a> 12	0	<a href="#">Animals and children</a>	LC subject headings



THOMSON GALE Expanded Academic ASAP

Results for:  10

Subject Terms	Results
<a href="#">Animals</a>	197072
<a href="#">Animals (Music Group)</a>	3
<a href="#">Animals in Art</a>	
<a href="#">Animals in Motion Pictures</a>	
<a href="#">Animals in Police Work</a>	
<a href="#">Animals in Television</a>	

5. If there is an online thesaurus of how words are used as subject headings/descriptors, or an index telling how often particular words are used in a database, consult it for possible search terms.