Analysing your topic

When you look at your assignment question, are you able to work out what you are being asked to do?

- if you’re unsure about the assignment topic
  o discuss the question with your friends or your lecturer.
  o check any unfamiliar terms in a dictionary - relevant subject dictionaries are listed in your library subject guide at [http://www.ecu.edu.au.libguides.com/](http://www.ecu.edu.au.libguides.com/)
- the reading list in your unit outline may list some relevant books and journal articles – check if these references are available in the Reserve Collection [http://library.ecu.edu.au/search/r](http://library.ecu.edu.au/search/r)
- Read your textbook as it will give you an overview of the topic – you may identify useful keywords that can be used when search your topic.

Starting your research

Step 1. Break your topic down into concepts

For example, in the assignment topic *The impact of global warming on Australia’s biodiversity*, you are being asked to cover 3 concepts: global warming, Australia and biodiversity

![Figure 1 Break down your topic into concepts](image)

Step 2. List additional terms

When you start searching for information, it is handy to make a list of additional terms as authors may use different words to describe the same topic. An author may approach the topic from a different perspective, using either a more specific or general approach. In either case, their research may still be of interest to you. For example:

![Figure 2 List additional terms](image)
Step 3. Use the * symbol to truncate a word
To automatically find variations of a word, use the * symbol.
For example, Australia* will find Australia’s OR Australian.

![Figure 3 Use the * symbol to truncate a word](image)

Step 4. Combing your terms using the operators AND and OR
Operators control how your keywords should be searched

**e.g.**  
*global warming* **AND** biodiversity  
AND narrows your search to only those items which mention both keywords

![Figure 4 Combining your terms using AND](image)

**e.g.**  
*global warning* **OR** climate change  
OR expands your search to include items which mention any of the keywords entered

Example of how to format your search

- **when searching using a single search box e.g. in ECU Worldsearch**  
(global warming OR climate change) AND Australia AND biodiversity  
i.e. enclose your alternative terms within brackets

- **some database provide a guided search with multiple search boxes**  
these generally include the operators AND, OR and brackets  
try to enter your alternative terms within one search box