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Handout Video SLB 2: Thinking Up Search Terms

Whenever you are searching for information, it is very important to use the right search terms. They determine what information you find, and what information you do not find.

For example, if you type in 'instruction' in the Ebsco eBooks Collection database, you get 38 results. If you type in 'training', you get 44. 'Teaching' gives 108 results, while 'education' produces 159.

As you can see from this example, the search terms you use have a direct impact on what you find. So, they are very important! But how can you think up the right search terms?

Divide your question into separate elements. Take this question for example:

"In which ways are educational games currently used at primary schools?"

The most important elements are *educational games* and *primary schools*. These elements should feature as terms in your search results. A term such as *currently* is less important as a search term as much information will cover current uses, but the term *currently* itself is often not used.

Then, think up alternative search terms for each separate element. You could use the following variants:

- *Synonyms*: primary education or elementary education.
- *Terms in a different language*, if applicable: primary education or basisonderwijs.
- *Technical terms*: learning difficulties or special educational needs.
- *Words written in their full or abbreviations*: Game-based learning or GBL.
- *Narrower terms*: instead of using primary schools, you could use nursery schools.

It is useful to group together all the search terms corresponding to each separate element so that you get a clear overall picture.

Do not be satisfied with the results you get from just typing in a few words but think carefully about using the right search terms from the very beginning. This way, you will achieve much better results and will save yourself a lot of time in the process.