

Search smarter

Map a big question, then turn the map into a search string.



LEARNING GOAL

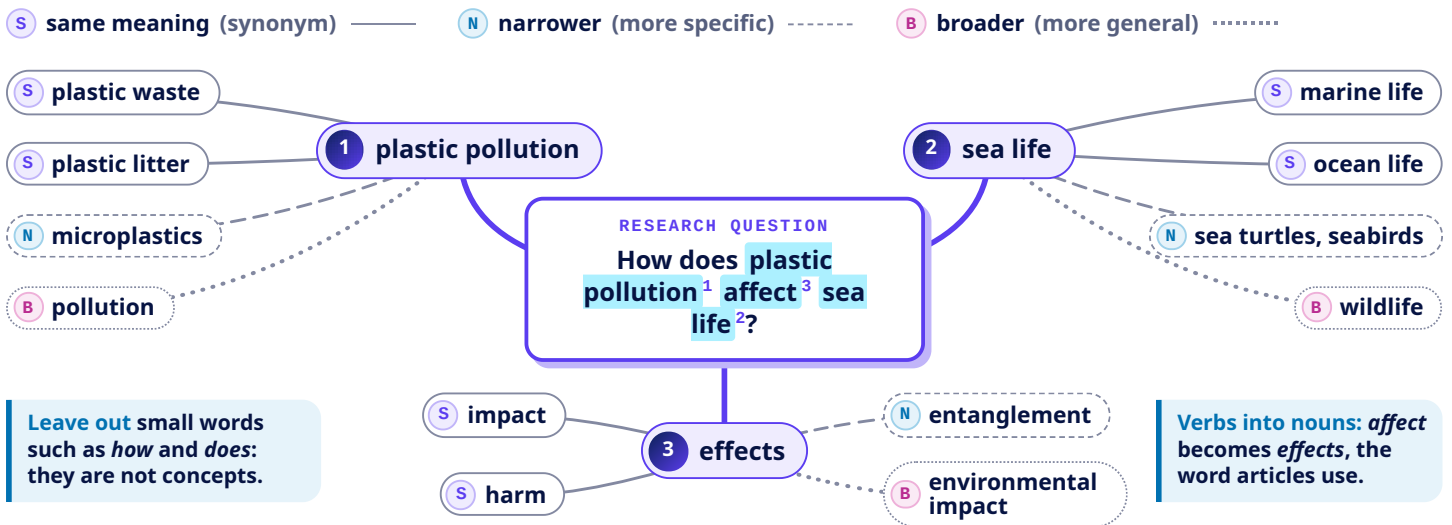
I can turn a broad question into a focused search string, then test and improve it.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- ☐ I can pick out the key concepts in a question.
- ☐ I can list synonyms, narrower and broader terms.
- ☐ I can use **AND**, **OR**, **NOT**, brackets and quotes.
- ☐ I can test a search, record it and refine it.

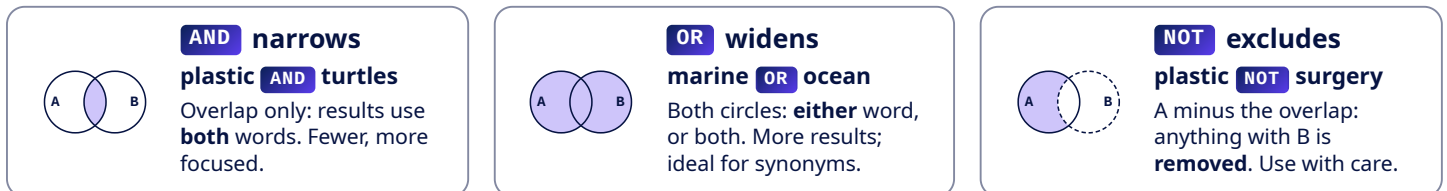
1 Map the question

WORKED EXAMPLE



2 Join terms with operators

Shaded = what the search finds. Type operators in CAPITALS: some tools only recognise them that way.



3 Build the search string

- " "** **Quotation marks** keep a phrase together: "sea life" finds the words side by side, in that order.
- *** **Truncation:** microplastic* finds microplastic and microplastics. Many library databases support it; not every search engine does.
- ()** **Brackets** group the OR words for one concept, so AND joins whole concepts.

FROM THE MAP: TWO OR THREE TERMS PER CONCEPT

("plastic pollution" **OR** "plastic waste" **OR** microplastic*) **1**

AND ("sea life" **OR** "marine life" **OR** "ocean life") **2**

AND (impact **OR** harm **OR** entanglement) **3**

Too few results? Take out block 3 first: many useful articles describe effects without these exact words.

Plan, test and refine your own search

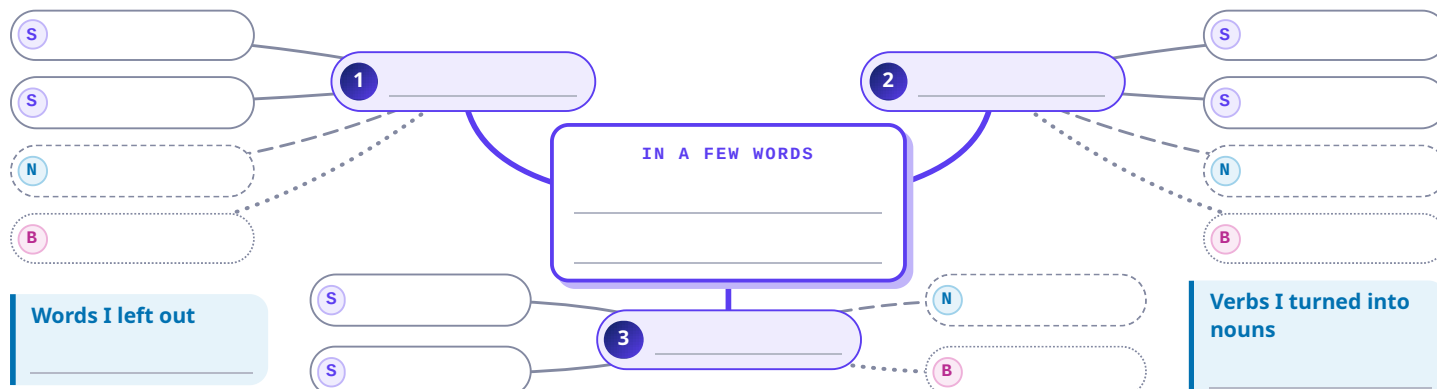


NAME _____ CLASS _____ DATE _____

4 Map your question

Write it, circle the key concepts, then fill the branches like page 1.

MY RESEARCH QUESTION _____



5 Build your search string

1 (_____ OR _____ OR _____)

AND 2 (_____ OR _____ OR _____)

AND 3 (_____ OR _____ OR _____)

CHECK BEFORE YOU SEARCH

- ☐ Phrases in "quotation marks"
- ☐ OR inside brackets
- ☐ AND between concepts
- ☐ Block 3 only if needed
- ☐ NOT only if I must

6 Test and refine log

Count the useful results in the first 10, then change one thing.

TRY	SEARCH STRING I USED	WHERE I SEARCHED	USEFUL	WHAT I CHANGED NEXT, AND WHY
1			/10	
2			/10	
3			/10	

7 Quick credibility check

One row per useful result. Circle your answers.

RESULT (TITLE OR SITE)	WHO MADE IT?	DATED?	MADE TO...	BACKED UP?	USE IT?
	expert group unknown	yes no	inform sell persuade	yes no	yes maybe no
	expert group unknown	yes no	inform sell persuade	yes no	yes maybe no
	expert group unknown	yes no	inform sell persuade	yes no	yes maybe no