

## ***Casting the Net: Generating, Vetting, and Collecting Keywords***

**Problem:** students frequently lack methods for organizing their initial broad passes of research. They rely on obvious keywords, lack strategies for evaluating the strength of keywords, and tend to gravitate to and stay in one database for their research.

This exercise aims to get students to 1) identify a root concept of their avenue of research 2) practice generating and recording keywords 3) vet and possibly eliminate self-generated keywords and 4) collect and record keywords discovered in article records within library databases. While not all research projects require the detail of this exercise, it models a process suitable to a large interdisciplinary research project.

Students should start by loosely articulating their research avenue (for faculty using my “Finding” exercise students would choose one of the “adjacent” avenues of research, or one of the rays of their sun map). In many research topics it is possible (and functionally advantageous) to choose a root concept that can serve as an anchor to the search process. By way of example:

Women/Gender in World Wrestling Federation - I would suggest that ‘World Wrestling Federation’ serve as the root or anchor to this research topic. It is quite specific and does not lend itself to an overwhelming number of synonyms. By contrast, quite a number of search terms can be applied to the revealingly vague ‘women/gender’ concept of this search. Note: not all examples are this obvious. It is really up to the student to choose the root concept; the goal here is to effectively limit the student such that they are no longer changing all search terms with each new search, thus preventing them from determining strong/weak keywords.

Working with the model on the reverse, ask students to fill in their root terms (maximum of three). Then ask them to generate three keywords to describe their non-root concept. Ask them to begin searching these combinations; evaluation of sources, at this point, should be limited to reviewing abstracts. They should mark out any self-generated keywords that do not result in any good results. As they vet their self-generated keywords, ask them to collect, vet, and record a minimum of five additional keywords from the records they review - they will gather these from subject headings, author supplied keywords, and the abstracts themselves. The best place to begin this exercise is in a large multidisciplinary database (Academic Search Premier, Wilson Omnifile, Proquest Research Library, etc.). After generating a solid research map in one of these databases, these same keywords can be vetted effectively in a disciplinary database (Social Science Full-text, PsycArticles, MLA, ERIC, etc.).

Again, the goal here is to move students past the keywords (and sources) that are most obvious to them and to get them collecting a wider collection of keywords (and sources) that cross disciplines.

Gathered from article records

BODY IMAGE

PASSION WORK

MASCULINITY

COSTUME

SEX ROLES

Student Supplied Keywords

FEMINI\* (FEMINIST, FEMININITY, FEMININE)

SEXUALITY

GENDER

WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION (WWF)

*These are **root** search terms: two or three should suffice*

SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT

Student Supplied Keywords

GENDER

SEXUALITY

FEMINI\* (FEMINIST, FEMININITY, FEMININE)

SEX ROLES

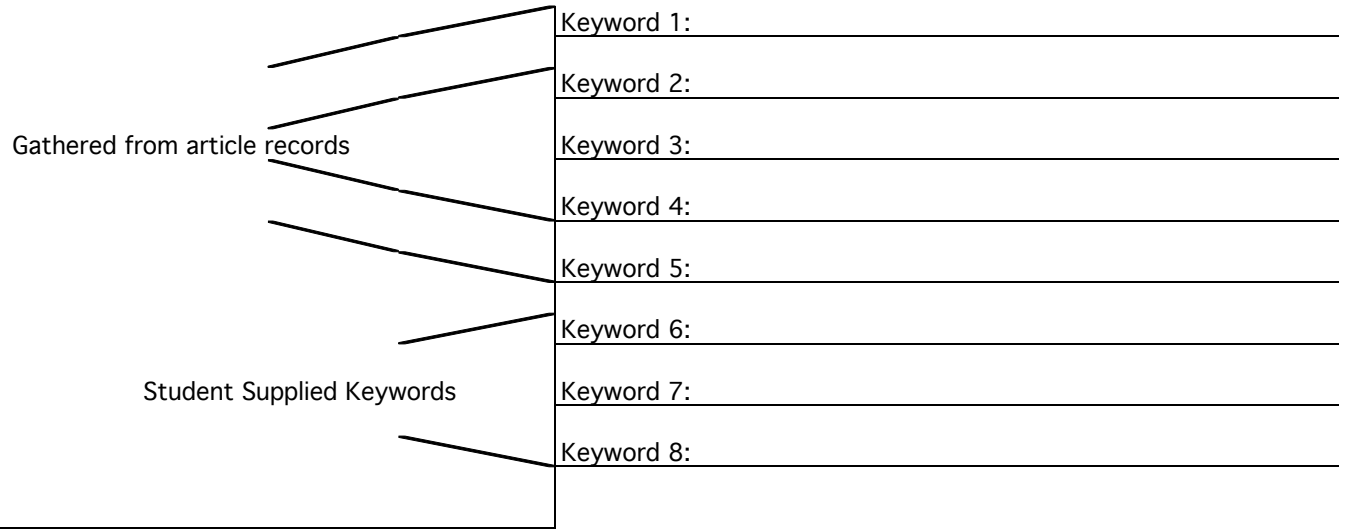
COSTUME

Gathered from article records

MASCULINITY

PASSION WORK

BODY IMAGE



Root Keyword 1:

Root Keyword 2:

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Root Keyword 3 (if needed):

