Our initial search did not display on the screen all the database items that discussed our topic because:

Search Language

1. There are usually many words and phrases that could be used to describe our topic, and

2. The database search engine is 'dumb' and only searches for the words we typed. The search engine does NOT search for other words that mean the same thing as the words we used, i.e., that are synonymous with the words we used.

Search Language

For example, if we were interested in children raised in single parent families, there are many ways that authors could describe that concept:

single parent family
one parent family
motherless family
fatherless family
mother absent family
father absent family
mother absence
father absence

Search Language

If we had typed the phrase

"single parent family"

the search engine result screen would NOT display items whose authors had used different terms to describe the subject

Search Language

Do we, as searchers, need to be 'word wizards' to pull from our heads all the different ways our topic might be described?

NO!

Search Language

The way that many academic databases are put together can provide the help that all searchers can use to construct effective searches

Search Language

Many organizations that produce academic databases pay people to:

1. examine every item indexed, and
2. assign subject terms that describe what each item deals with

The subject terms come from a thesaurus created by each database-producing organization

Search Language

- Database producers display the subject terms from the thesaurus in each database record
- On the screen, these terms are often labeled *subjects* or *descriptors*

Subject Language

- You, the searcher, can use the displayed subject terms/descriptors to improve your database search results. HOW?

  1. Look for subject terms/descriptors in each database record that are **synonymous** with the terms you used when you originally entered the search.

  2. Then, **redo the search** using the database subject/descriptor terms that you found.