Effectively Searching Electronic Databases

**OBJECTIVE:** Upon completion of the *Effectively Searching Electronic Databases* component, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate searching capabilities by performing searching in various electronic databases.

Here are some tips to save you time and frustration when searching electronic databases:

1. Read the help page about the database you are searching, especially if you are unfamiliar with the database. The help page provides information and helpful tips on how to effectively find the results that you need.

2. Check your spelling. Databases will search exactly for what is entered in the search box.

3. Use the appropriate database for your topic. For example, a health-related database may not be the best place to find information when researching the career of Lady Gaga. A general information database would be more appropriate.
   - You can find descriptions of the databases from the database page or by going to [http://library.sullivan.edu/Database/Lists/Databases/ByAlphabetical.aspx](http://library.sullivan.edu/Database/Lists/Databases/ByAlphabetical.aspx).
   - If you are unsure about which database to use for a topic, you may want to explore [http://library.sullivan.edu/Database/Lists/Databases/BySubject.aspx](http://library.sullivan.edu/Database/Lists/Databases/BySubject.aspx). This site provides a listing of databases by subject.

4. The **Advanced Search** features can help you “fine-tune” a search:
   - You can usually limit or refine a search by:
     - Dates
     - Type of publication (i.e. scholarly journal, magazine, newspaper, etc.)
     - Full-text

5. **Other ways to broaden a search** when you are retrieving few or no results:
   - Use synonyms. Doctor is another term for Physician. Using both these terms in a search will retrieve more results.
     - **Expand your topic.** For example, doing a search for dogs will retrieve more results than a search for poodles.

6. **Other ways to narrow a search** when you are retrieving too many results:
   - Be more specific. Search for an aspect of your topic. For example, when researching a person, you could focus on the career or childhood, not the person's entire life.
   - **Limit your topic.** For example, if you are searching for dogs, searching for poodles will reduce your results.
Placing a phrase in quotations, e.g., “gone with the wind,” will often keep the phrase together and return only those results with the phrase.

In conclusion, there are many techniques that can be used to improve a search. Practice in the use of the electronic databases will help you avoid frustration and advance your skills.