

## Define the Research Topic

### **Problem Definition**

The first -- and most important -- element of developing an effective research strategy is to clearly define and understand the problem statement. Business students are sometimes unclear in regard to the specific information that they need.

In many cases, this results in collecting enormous amounts of data and then sifting through it hoping to find relevant information. This is not a good approach!

There are several proven techniques that will help you develop an effective search strategy.

### **One Approach is to State Your Topic as a Question**

The formulation of research questions and hypotheses help to clarify a topic. For example, if your topic is about the handheld device industry, you could ask the following questions:

*Who are the major players in the industry?*

*What is the market share? Has it changed in the past three years?*

*What do industry sales indicate for the market?*

*What were the total sales for this industry during the past year? The past five years?*

*Describe Nokia's marketing strategy?*

*How much does Motorola spend on advertising?*

*Why did the PDA market shift?*

*What are the target markets?*

*How segmented is the industry?*

### **Another Approach is to Identify Important Concepts and Key Terms**

Once you have stated your topic as a question, identify the main concepts, phrases, or keywords. Do this by highlighting the significant terms and create a weighted list. For example:

*Handheld devices*

*Sales*

*Market share*

*Industry trends*

*Advertising Expenditures*

## Create a Word Bank of Related Terms and Concepts

Once you have identified keywords and concepts, create a list of related terms. The list will provide additional words to integrate into a database search. For example:

Devices	Market Share	Industry Trends	Marketing
smart phones	competitors	revenues	ad campaigns
PDAs	rankings	enhanced services	media
camera phones	market ownership	new products	segments

## Finally, Narrow or Broaden Your Search

Often finding too much or too little information may mean that you have to narrow or broaden your search terms.

For example, if you get too many hits from a search – let’s say more than 200 hits – you may need to narrow or limit the search using various advanced search techniques.

One simple way to narrow or limit a search is to add more search terms.

A simulated search using the business database Factiva serves as an excellent example.

If we search:

*pda and sales* (18,000 hits)

*pda and sales and Nokia* (2,000 hits)

*pda and sales and Nokia and forecasts* (175 hits)

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