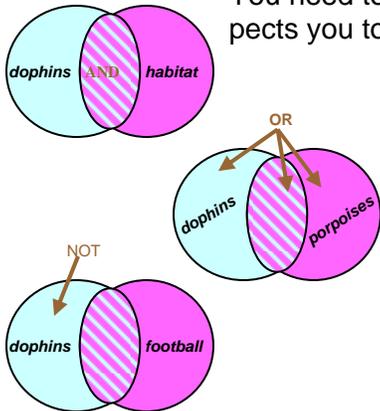# BEFORE STARTING A SEARCH

Creating a Search Strategy

Determine your topic. (Make sure it is not too broad or narrow.)
Determine the basic search terms/key words from your question/thesis (usually found in your topic statement).
Ask these questions:

Are there any synonyms or related terms? (e.g. death penalty/capital punishment)

Do any of your terms have multiple meanings or usages? (e.g. dolphin can be the mammal or the Miami Dolphins football team)

Are there any plurals or variants that you will need to use? (e.g. panda/pandas or woman/women or mouse/mice)

Are any of your terms acronyms or abbreviations and for what do they stand? (e.g. SIDS = Sudden Infant Death Syndrome: St. = Saint or Street)

Are there any broader or narrower terms you should consider? (The Library of Congress Subject Headings volumes in the Reference Area can help with this.)

What type of database(s) will you be searching? Do you need to know any specialized terminology? (e.g. medical terms if using a medical database) Are you in the right database? (e.g. ProQuest Newspapers lists <u>only</u> newspapers) Does it cover the subject and/or time frame you need?

K.I.S.S. (Keep it simple) - Do not enter any more information than necessary. Remember that the system has to match all the terms you put in. You want to keep control of your search.

"Talking" to the Computer *

You need to know the form (e.g. spelling, grammar, symbols) in which the computer expects you to type so that it understands for what you are searching.

Learn to use "and," "or," and "not" correctly.

AND - When you want *all* your search terms in your results (**both** "dolphins" and "habitat" will be in the resulting items)

OR - When you want *either* or both of your search terms in your results(**either** "dolphins" or "porpoises" or both will be in the results)

NOT - When you want to eliminate something, such as a multiple meanings ("dolphins" **without** "football" - allows you to eliminate something you don't want from the results)

Learn to use the correct symbols (e.g. " ", +, -, ( ), *, ?).
Determine what functions the database/search engine you are using will support.

Remember that each database/search engine is different and may have a different syntax.

Consulting the "Help" Screens

All databases and search engines have "help" screens.
Look for "search tips," "how to search," "basic searching," etc.

* for electronic searches - this information will be found on the "Help"