Evaluating Your Strategy Checklist

Too Much Information	Too Little Information	Wrong Type of Information
☐ **Try looking at an irrelevant record your search retrieved.** Can you figure out why the database gave it to you? Did you use one word that the computer misunderstood? See if you can use a more specific term or maybe a short phrase that excludes the meaning you don't want. Try adding a new term that makes your old term more specific. **Ex: Instead of: Japan and economy, try: Japan and economy and (auto or automobile or car)**	☐ **Did you spell your search terms correctly?** Research databases are remarkable tools, but they don't come equipped with spell checkers. One misspelled word can sink an entire search query. Check a dictionary.	☐ **Check the coverage of the databases you're using.** Do they cover the kinds of material you need? The right discipline(s)? The right kinds of documents? The right dates?
☐ **Check where in the record your search terms matched.** The best matches for topics are in fields like Subject or Title. Look for an Advanced or Expert Search option in the database to search in specific fields only, if you can.	☐ **Get rid of long phrases.** When you type in a phrase, all the words must appear in exactly that order before the database will give you anything. Some databases automatically put the operator AND between the words you type, turning your phrase into a long Boolean search string.	☐ **Try going to "Search Library-Selected Resources"** in the UW Libraries' Information Gateway (there's a link in the right margin of this page.) Set the menu for the kind of sources you want (books, articles, web sites, etc.) and your general subject area (History, Biology, etc.) This will generate a list of good starting points in your subject.
☐ **Use limiters when they're available**. Will the database let you ask for publications only in English? Can you ask for only journal articles? Want more recent information? Is there a subject heading that covers your topic? Can you get rid of book and film reviews? Play around with your options and see if they help.	☐ **Try to come up with broader terms for the idea you need**. Every so often, it happens that there's very little written on a specific topic, but a lot on the general area. **Very narrow**: recombinant DNA and **Narrow**: cloning and animals **Broader**: genetic engineering and animal* **Very broad**: genetic* and animal*	☐ **Try drilling down through the "By Subject"** links under the Find It category on the Information Gateway. They're set up like Yahoo! and similar Web sites, which means you have to know what general field your subject falls under (Social Sciences? Sciences? Interdisciplinary (2 or more disciplines)? Government and Law?) Try a few of these and see where you can find your subject and try using some of the databases you find linked there.
☐ **Try using the NOT operator.** You should only use it when you are sure that there is NO article with that term that you might want. Some databases use NOT alone, others use AND NOT. Some Web search engines use a minus sign (-). Look for the database HELP or try both. **Ex: (Iran and Iraq) not war**	☐ **Try using alternative terms.** That's what you gathered all the extra vocabulary for. Don't forget truncation or wildcards for variant forms of a word.	