HOW DO I
CHOOSE KEYWORDS FOR MY SEARCH?
Does increased use of hand sanitizer or hand washing by health care personnel reduce cross-infection rates in U.S. hospitals?

First, write the research question you plan to explore. Be aware that the question may change as you learn more about the topic; this is a normal part of the process.
Does increased use of hand sanitizer or hand washing by health care personnel reduce cross-infection rates in U.S. hospitals?

Look for the key concepts in your research question.

Look for nouns:
- People
- Places
- Things

They’ll be the most helpful search terms.
Think of related terms

- hand washing
- health care personnel
- cross-infection

- handwashing
- hand sanitizers
- hand hygiene
- medical personnel
- physicians
- nurses
- hospital acquired infections
- disease control
- microbial contamination
Once you’ve come up with your list of keywords and related terms, link them with the appropriate Boolean operators.

Boolean operators define relationships between search terms and can broaden or narrow your search.

The three Boolean operators are AND, OR, and NOT
nurses **and** hand washing **and** cross infection

Use **AND** to link search terms when you want to narrow or focus your results. **AND** tells the database to bring back results that include **all** of these terms.
As you can see from our search results, searching for nurses has thousands more results than searching for nurses and hand washing. Linking terms with AND narrowed our search.
Use OR to link synonyms or related terms. This will broaden your search and tells the database to bring back results that include any of these terms.
Boolean operators

You can see the difference OR makes in our search results. Adding additional terms for nurses, linked by OR, retrieves many more search results than searching for nursing alone.
hand washing \textbf{not} masks

NOT is used to exclude unrelated terms from your search results. Use NOT sparingly—an article about masks may contain information about handwashing that could be relevant to your research.
Use parentheses

(hand washing or hand hygiene)

AND

(nurses or doctors or healthcare personnel)

If you’re using multiple Boolean operators in your search, place parentheses around search terms linked by OR to ensure that your search is interpreted correctly.
Use quotation marks

“hand hygiene”
“hand sanitizers”

Quotation marks keep phrases together. They tell the database to search for those exact terms, in that exact order.
A search for hand sanitizer without quotation marks will retrieve materials on hand sanitizers. However, it will also find and retrieve references with the single word hand and the single word sanitizer (hand tools, food sanitizer, etc.). Using quotation marks will help narrow your search results.