



## MicroModule: Query

### REVIEW Page

Below is the entire module on one page.



An individual query is exactly what you ask your search engine to go looking for. It is the distilled essence of your questions; formed in a way that best retrieves the information you are seeking. A question is not a query. Think instead of a question as the first step in forming your query and beginning the process of inquiry. Understanding this distinction allows you to create a query in the most meaningful and effective manner by directly crafting the keywords and syntax that will begin your search. To do this you must understand how to select keywords and use operators.

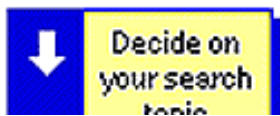
A query is made up of the keywords that describe your topic *and* the arrangement of those keywords using operators that focus the retrieval process. From a question like: 'How do you track satellites?' You extract the keywords (track and satellite). You may want to add additional keywords like orbiter and telemetry. Now you have the building blocks to construct a successful query.

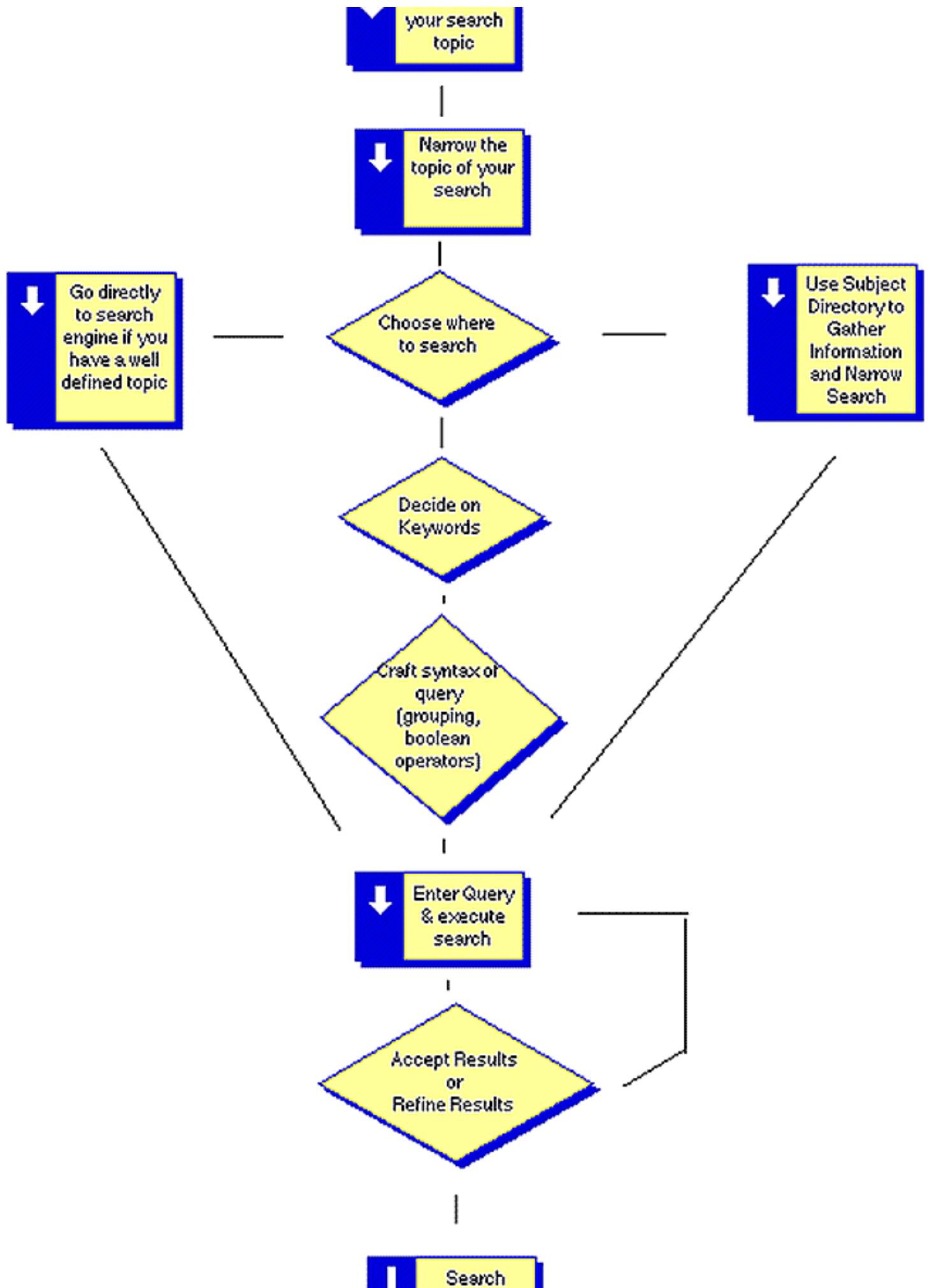
### The Query Process

*To query* describes the entire search process. Query also refers to the entire *process of searching*. This process is a series of decisions and actions. This action path can be understood as a distinct process. (See figure: The Query Process.) Once you have decided on a topic, you decide on where to search. If your topic is vague, consider browsing a subject index in order to refine your ideas and improve your query formation. If you have a narrow and specific topic, go directly to a search engine.

Once the query is formed, you enter the terms into the search box of the selected search engine or subject index. You then evaluate the results. If you find what you are after, the process ends. Otherwise, you revise your search strategy and begin again. Revision may include changing or rearranging your query terms, or selecting a new search engine.

## The Query Process







## What is the difference between a question and a query?



When you ask a question you have the beginnings of a query. Although some search engines such as Ask Jeeves, encourage you to use a natural language question format, all search engines ignore the question mark and focus on the key terms in your request. If you ask, 'How do you track satellites?' A search engine will focus on the words track and satellites, filtering out 'how do you?' as irrelevant to the search. (See the IMSA Micro Module: Using Keywords Effectively for more on why search engines use 'Stop Words').

A query then is the distilled essence of your questions. To form a query you extract the keywords from your question and add new terms that more precisely describe your search goal. By directly crafting combinations of keywords and syntax, you form your query in the most meaningful and effective manner.

Search engines ignore common words and punctuation. They focus instead on keywords that best represent meaning.

TEOMA<sup>SM</sup>

How do you track satellites?

Search

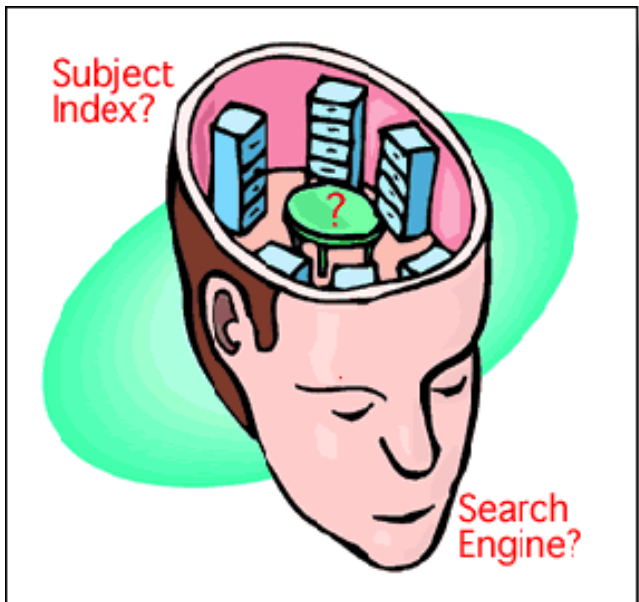
Search with Authority<sup>SM</sup>

Find this phrase

• [Advanced Search](#)

• [Preferences](#)

Distill your 'query' from your questions!



### When should I choose a subject index over a search engine?

At the beginning of your 'query process' you must decide where to look for your information. Use a subject index when you have a general idea of what you are looking for, but need to develop more specific ideas. You'll be able to narrow the focus of your search quickly by browsing for concepts and keywords in the right subject categories. Once you find the right subcategories, the carefully selected information in the subject index will help you decide on what you are really looking for. Subject indexes help you go from broad categories of information to more specific ones.

The more specific and limited your area of investigation, the more appropriate it will be to use a search engine. Search engines allow you to use queries to find highly specific information. If you already understand the unique vocabulary needed to form a good query you might be better off going directly to a search engine. Additionally, if you need timely information a search engine is more likely to produce up to the minute results. (To learn more about how to use subject indexes see the IMSA Micro Module: Subject Indexes.)

### How can I find more about keyword selection?

Nothing will help you find just the right information more quickly than using well-chosen keywords in your query. By extracting the most meaningful words from your questions you focus your query. Keywords that return millions of hits are worthless, you want to work with keywords that accurately narrow search results. The right keywords are the fastest path to the relevant information you are after. (For more on how to distill just the right combination of keywords from all the possibilities, see the IMSA Micro Module: Keywords.)

### What are operators? How do operators affect queries?

AND	Requires all terms to appear somewhere in the document, in any order. Example: curriculum AND high AND school
+	Requires all terms to appear somewhere in the document, in any order. Example: +curriculum+high+school
" "	Requires all terms within the quotation marks to appear in the order written. Creates a highly specific phrase. Example: "high school curriculum"
NOT	Excludes documents containing whatever follows it. Example: high school curriculum not .com
-	Excludes documents containing whatever follows it. Example: high school curriculum-.com
OR	Includes any page with at least one of the terms. Example: high OR school OR curriculum

You can use operators in your query to instruct the search engine to exclude a term. For example the query dolphins-football will exclude the word football from all documents retrieved.

You can use operators to group individual terms into an exact phrase like "George Washington professional football player".

You can search for keywords that appear in an important 'field' within the HTML code of a web page. For example title: science will return pages with the word science in the title of the page.

When you craft a query using specific keywords and operators you can often find just what you are looking for with your first search. (To learn more about the art of using operators, see the IMSA Micro Module: Operators.)

Authored by Dennis O'Connor 2003-2005



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