Library Services

How can we help answer your question?

The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly

Andrew M. Moore, Librarian

Ashley Lavoie, Library Technician
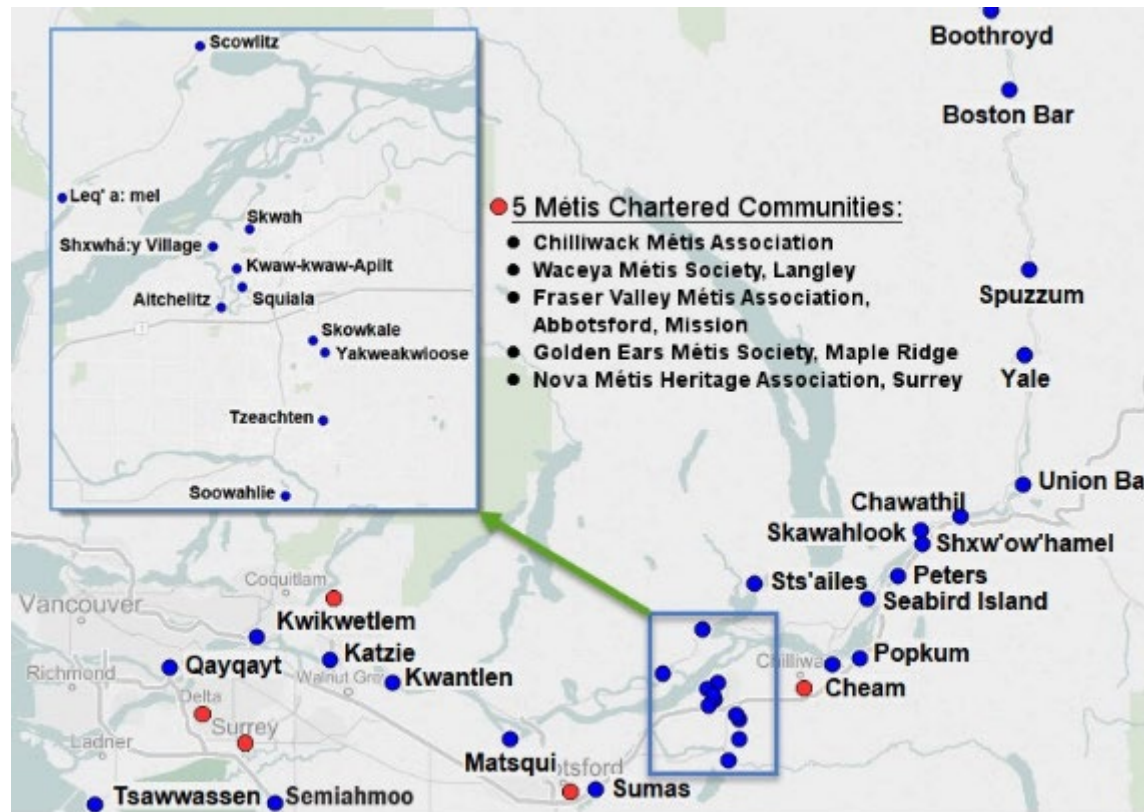
2022-02-17
Lunch & Learn
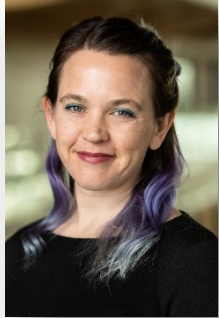Online

fraserhealth
Better health. Best in health care.

Library Services

Territory Acknowledgement

Fraser Health Library Services staff would like to begin by acknowledging that we live, work and provide service across the unceded, traditional, ancestral territories of thirty-two Coast Salish and Nlaka'pamux (ing-klə-KAP-mə) Nations.
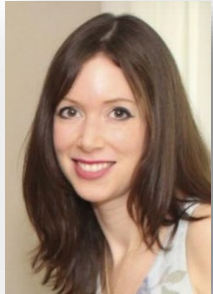
Brooke Scott

Manager

brooke.scott@fraserhealth.ca

Andrew Moore

Librarian

andrew.moore@fraserhealth.ca

Julie Mason

Librarian

julie.mason@fraserhealth.ca

Ashely Lavoie

Library Technician

ashley.lavoie@fraserhealth.ca

Sarah Gleeson Noyes

Librarian

sarah.gleesonnoyes@fraserhealth.ca

Allison Lambert

Library Technician

allison.lambert@fraserhealth.ca

Erin Brady-Randle

Librarian

erin.bradyrandle@fraserhealth.ca

Anita Thompson

Library Technician

anita.thompson@fraserhealth.ca

Library Services

Objectives

1. To Discuss what Makes a 'Bad' Question, within the context of research

2. To (briefly) go over examples of what makes a question unanswerable.

3. To discuss ways to mitigate, wherever possible, this issue.

What makes a 'Bad' Question?

From the perspective of Library Services a 'Bad' question is any question which is unanswerable.

Why do searches fail?

A (non)-exhaustive list.

Why Searches Fail:
Context, Specificity & Complexity-
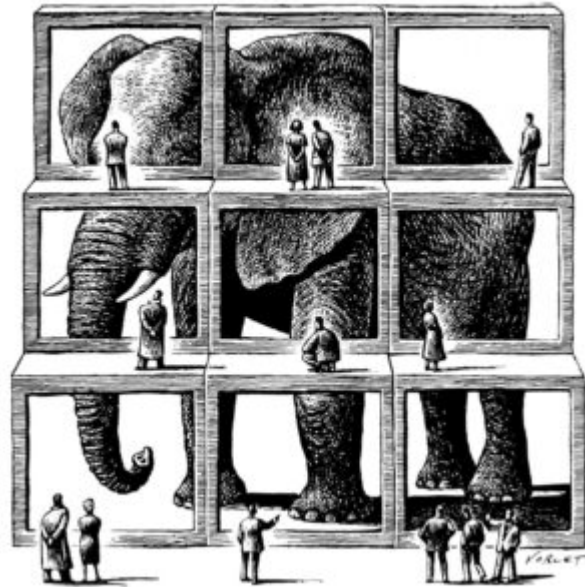## Helpful Limiters, or Slayer of Searches?

Yes. And No. And Yes.

The narrow end limits how much can pass through the funnel.

Why Searches Fail:
Context, Specificity & Complexity-
Helpful Limiters, or Slayer of Searches?

Context:
The context a search takes place in matters!

Therefore:
Lack of context for the search can be actively detrimental-
context can be the difference between finding great evidence, or
finding nothing.

Why Searches Fail:
Context, Specificity & Complexity-
Helpful Limiters, or Slayer of Searches?

Specificity (and Accuracy)
The specificity and accuracy of your search, and the terms used to frame it, have big effects on the results you see.

Example: Keyword Search For 'Pediatrics' vs. 'Paediatrics' vs. 'Pediatracs'

Results: 30,497 vs. 1,887 vs. 0

fraserhealth **Library Services**
Better health. Best in health care.

Why Searches Fail:
Context, Specificity & Complexity-
Helpful Limiters, or Slayer of Searches?

Specificity (and Accuracy)
At the same time, it is also important to know how the database itself frames the question. It may not be the same way you do, or Fraser Health does.

Example: Acute Care vs. Critical Care

What This Means: A search that only looks for Acute Care, <u>doesn't</u> actually find everything about Acute Care.

YOU KEEP USING THAT WORD

I DO NOT THINK IT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS

fraserhealth **Library Services**
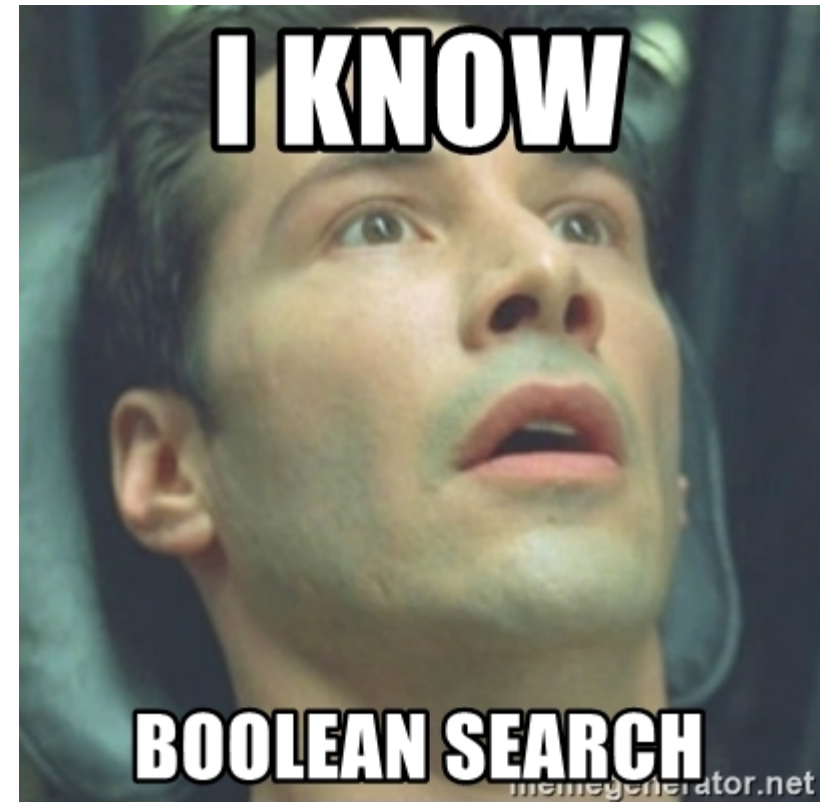
Better health. Best in health care.

Why Searches Fail:
Context, Specificity & Complexity-
Helpful Limiters, or Slayer of Searches?

Specificity (and Accuracy)
- There are also a lot of things that can effectively improve the quality of a search:
  - Subject Headings
  - Boolean Operators (And/Or/Not)
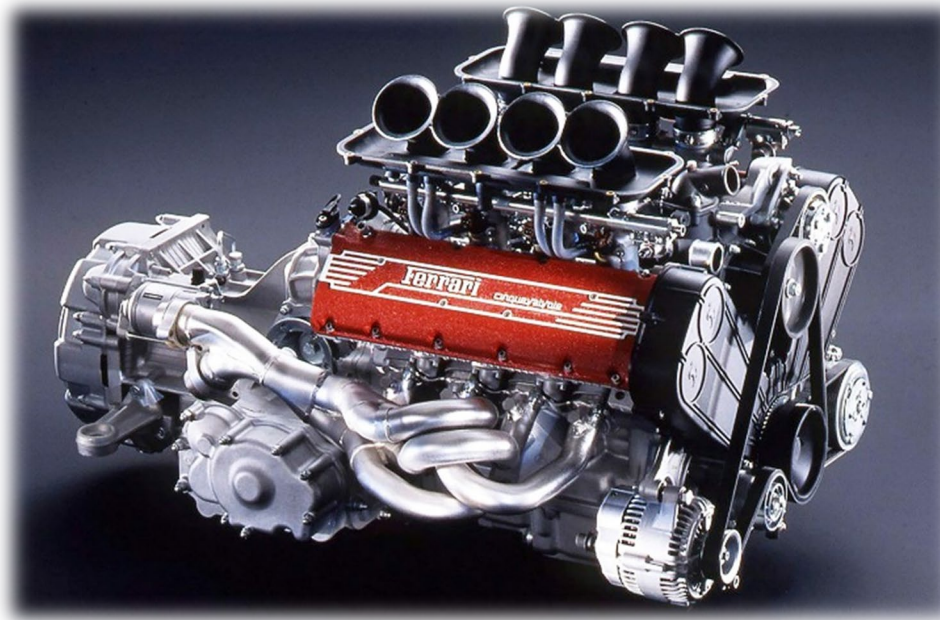 - Wildcard Searching (Pediat*)
  - Utilizing Limiters

Why Searches Fail:
Context, Specificity & Complexity-
Helpful Limiters, or Slayer of Searches?

Complexity

• Generally, the more complex a search is, the more limited the available results will be.

• For now, think of it like an engine; the more moving parts a search has, the more potential for trouble there may be.

Why Searches Fail:
Acronyms, Jargon & Silos (Oh My!)

Acronyms & Jargon

- Are a great way to short-hand complicated concepts to people in-the-know.

- **Problem**: Not everyone is in the know, and not everyone uses the exact terminology you do.

WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE.

SOME MEN YOU JUST CAN'T REACH.

memegenerator.net

Why Searches Fail:
Acronyms, Jargon & Silos (Oh My!)

Example: "I would like to learn a little more about ACEs. Could you please find me some recent articles about it?"

Problem: What exactly does ACE mean, to you? Is it:
- Adverse Childhood Events
- Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme Inhibitors
- The Acute Concussion Evaluation scale
- The Arm-Crank Exercise
- The Playing Card

Why Searches Fail:
Acronyms, Jargon & Silos (Oh My!)

Professional Silos, Niche Topics and Over-Specifying.

Example I: "I would like to see some new articles about Cardiology."

Example II: "I would like to see some new articles about Cardiology from British Columbia only."

Example III: "I would like to see some new articles about Pediatric Cardiology from British Columbia Only"

Why Searches Fail:
Ethics, Methodology & Feasibility Issues

Generally speaking, research which is more challenging to conduct on Ethical, Methodological or Feasible grounds will be rarer.

- **Ethics:** Any paper which involves Vulnerable Populations is held to a stringently high ethical standard.

- **Feasibility:** A 20 Year Longitudinal Study may provide incredible results. It also takes 20 years.

- **Methodology**: Lack of existing/accurate measurement tools makes answering certain types of questions very challenging.

fraser**health** **Library Services**

Better health. Best in health care.

Ok. What are some other examples?

Case Study: The Challenge of Short-Term Problems & Preventive Health.

Question- What are the downstream cost-savings for patients at risk for Type-II Diabetes, who undertake a public health interventional program?

Why is this question 'Bad'?
Most Academic Health Literature proceeds from a set of assumptions:
- o You have a sick patient- How do we make this patient as healthy as we can?
- o We have a problem or issue- How do we fix/mitigate/solve it?

Result: A question that's tricky to answer!

fraserhealth **Library Services**
Better health. Best in health care.

Case Study: The Unique Issue of Staffing Questions

Question: What is the ideal staff/patient ratio for my unit?

Why is this question 'Bad'? Generally speaking, your unit is fairly unique, even within the context of similar units within Fraser Health.

Problem: Every medical unit is essentially as unique as yours.

Result: Because of this, there isn't always a lot of push to write articles about staffing ratios for specific types of unit. This limits available resources even more.

Look, you've got it all wrong! You don't *need* to follow me. You don't *need* to follow *anybody*! You've got to think for yourselves! You're *all* individuals!

Yes! We're all individuals!
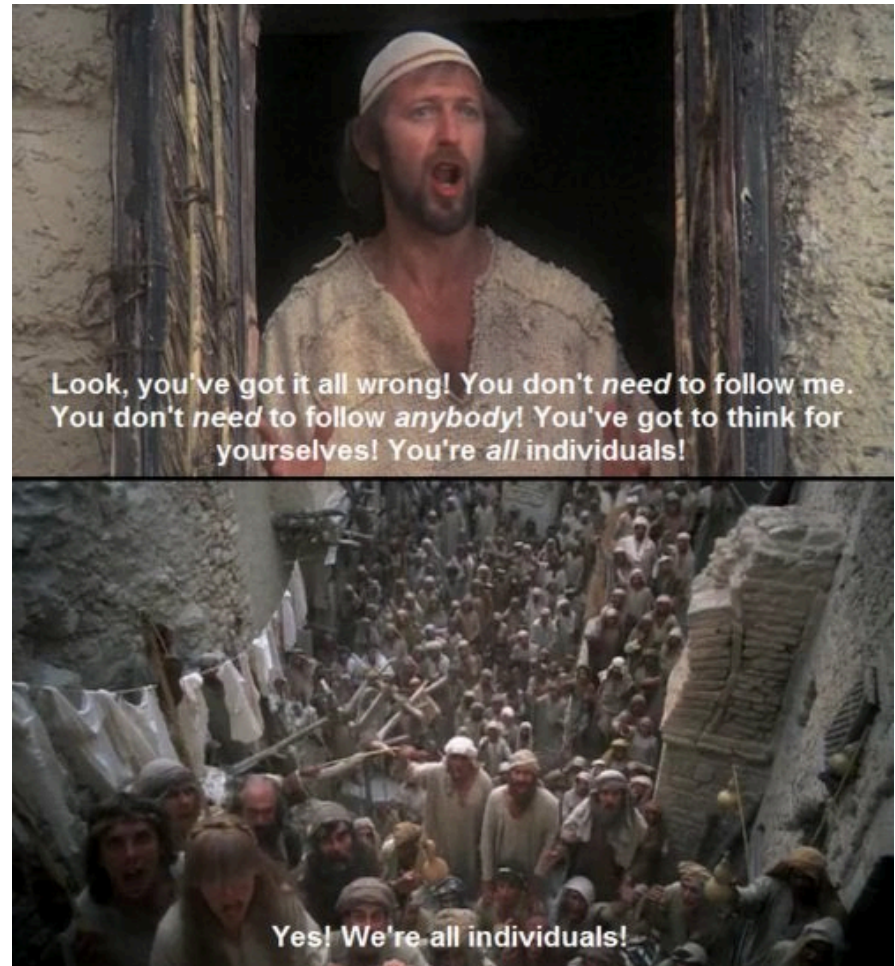
fraserhealth **Library Services**

Better health. Best in health care.

Case Study: The Problems of Negative Press

Question I- What is the prevalence of drug diversion by hospital staff in North America?

Question II- How prevalent is workplace bullying within hospital staff?

Why are these 'Bad' Questions?
- Medical Literature likes to speak about success stories, especially on an Institutional Level.

Problem: Medical Literature does NOT like talking much about straight-out failure, especially systematic failures.

Result: Institutions may be unlikely to fund/approve publication of papers like this, due to the optics.

THE RULES OF *FIGHT CLUB*

#1 YOU *do not talk* ABOUT FIGHT CLUB.
#2 YOU *do not talk* ABOUT FIGHT CLUB.

Mitigation

- Avoid Jargon and Acronyms, or explain them!

- Consider the focus of the question. Could broadening the scope still provide good results?

- Could other specializations/areas of medicine have insight into this question?

- Consider whether variant spellings to key-words, or synonyms to key-words might provide more results.

- Use Subject Headings to frame the search.

- Keep an eye on the terms you're using to frame the search, and how many moving parts the search has.

- Recognize that the research you're looking for doesn't take place in a vacuum, and that outside factors may effect what gets published, and when, and how.

- Ask your Library Staff for strategies to improve the search/modify the question.

fraserhealth Library Services

Better health. Best in health care.

Questions?

fraserhealth **Library Services**

Better health. Best in health care.

fraserhealth **Library Services**

Better health. Best in health care.