The following research topic is an example taken from a graduate-level research paper that was written for the Disaster and Emergency Management program. I have taken the topic below, examined it, and identified research questions to guide the research process. Review this example to get a better idea of how to identify the key components of your research question as well as how to build search strategies around it.

**Colour Key:**

Green highlighted text indicates the main topic

Blue highlighted text indicates the aspects of the main topic the researcher is interested in

**Topic:**

The development of the incident command system (ICS), and strengths and limitations of this system.

Because there are three aspects of the main topic I am interested in, I ended up having three separate research questions to answer. Look below to see how I created searches based on these questions.

**Research questions:**

1. **What are the strengths of the incident command system?**

To develop an initial search, I focused on the highlighted words, and combined them using AND. **AND** ensures the database looks for published works that contain both words. Because the term incident command system is a very specific three-word phrase, I placed this portion of the search in quotations. The use of quotations, also known as **“phrase searching”** ensures the database I am searching looks for these words in that exact order.

Initial search:

**strengths AND “incident command system”**

Because I know authors will refer to the same topic using different words, the next step was to think of synonyms for my initial search terms to assist me in finding resources and to ensure I was being thorough. Remember the goal is to find ***good*** information, not just quick information.

I read the abstracts of the items I was finding on this topic and noticed that for “incident command system”, the acronym ICS was commonly used. For strengths, I noticed other words being used, such as pros and advantages. My subsequent searches would include all these keywords and look like this:

**pros AND** **(“incident command system” OR ICS)**

**advantages AND** **(“incident command system” OR ICS)**

These searches could be combined into one large search:

**(strengths OR pros OR advantages) AND** **(“incident command system” OR ICS)**

When adding synonyms to your search, encase them in **brackets** and combine them using **OR**. For more detail on building searches, view the following:

<http://library.royalroads.ca/infoquest-tutorials/searching>

I went through the same process for buiding searches for questions two and three.

1. **What are the limitations of the incident command system?**

Initial search: **limitations AND “incident command system”**

For limitations, I thought of other words with similar meaning such as: cons, weaknesses, and disadvantages, so my subsequent searches looked like this:

**cons AND (“incident command system” OR ICS)**

**weaknesses AND (“incident command system” OR ICS)**

**disadvantages AND (“incident command system” OR ICS)**

These searches could be combined into one large search:

**(limitations OR cons OR weaknesses OR disadvantages) AND (“incident command system” OR ICS)**

1. **What is the history behind the incident command system?**

The word used in my original topic statement was development. However, what I was really after was the history of the incident command sytem, so I changed it.

Initial search: **history AND “incident command system”**

For history, I thought of also trying: origin

**origin AND** **(“incident command system” OR ICS)**

These searches could be combined into one large search:

**(history OR origin) AND (“incident command system” OR ICS)**

Many searches were needed to thoroughly explore all aspects of this topic. Expect to do many searches when exploring your own topic. Also, expect to use multiple search tools to ensure you are doing a comprehensive search of the literature.