As you’re looking for information you might discover that you’re having a hard time finding exactly what you need. You might have too many results and the sources’ topics might be too broad. This quick guide will teach you how to phrase search. Phrase searching is a more advanced technique that will help you create effective searches.

**Phrase Searching**

Phrase searching is a great method to help you narrow your search results. Let’s say you’re working on a topic like the Renaissance paintings from Rome, Italy and your keyword search using Renaissance in one of the databases brought back 143,000 journal articles—that’s a lot of articles to look through! Also, you might have noticed that the majority of these articles deal with the Renaissance across all of Europe and you need to focus on paintings from the city of Rome. Phrase searching will help you narrow and focus your results.

To phrase search, you add quotation marks around the exact words you would like to find in the sources your search brings back.

Using our example topic of the Renaissance painting in Rome, you would enter: “Roman Renaissance painting” in the search box.

Including the quotation marks group the words together and makes the database search engine return results that only group those words together in that exact order.

**Example 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search entered</th>
<th>Number of Results Returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Renaissance Painting</td>
<td>46,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“ Roman Renaissance Painting”</td>
<td>1,965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In example number one, we see that including quotation marks around our search terms dramatically drops the number of search results and potentially helps us weed out sources outside our research interests.
Example 2:

**Article 1**


During the Renaissance period, many figural types of Christ emerged. In *Roman Renaissance painting*, the Triumphant Christ type is one of the most fascinating.

**Article 2**


Often *Renaissance* studies focus on the *Roman* tradition of *painting* ignoring the work of the Renaissance masters in northern Europe.

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Example # 2 shows us how phrase searching can help us focus in on the sources that really pertain to our topic.

However, phrase searching can have its down sides as Example # 3 below illustrates.
Example # 3:

Article 1

“Triumphant Christ types in Roman Renaissance Painting” *Art History Journal*, vol 6, pp 89-115.

During the Renaissance period, many figural types of Christ emerged. In *Roman Renaissance painting*, the Triumphant Christ type is one of the most fascinating.....

Article 1 would be retrieved using the phrase search “Roman Renaissance Painting” because the exact phrase “Roman Renaissance Painting” appears in the title of the article and again in the article itself.

Article 2


Michelangelo wanted to be known as a sculptor. In his mind, *painting* was not his part of his artistic calling however, we find in *Rome* some of the most genius works with a paintbrush that the *Renaissance* period would ever see....

Article 2 would NOT be retrieved when using the phrase search “Roman Renaissance Painting” because the exact phrase does NOT appear in the title or in the article. We see the words Rome, Renaissance, and painting but they are not put together in the exact phrase we used to search and bound with quotation marks.

In Example # 3, we see how phrase searching might exclude a source that would work perfectly for this research topic. This example shows us that we shouldn’t rely on one kind of search method to find sources for our research projects and that we should try different techniques to locate the best resources available.