

# 10 Tips for Patent Searching

## Tip 1.

When searching for key words remember to get a little creative to avoid missing patents. The same word can have multiple meanings in different contexts (See Example A) or the same thing can be known by another word in other parts of the world (See Example B). Patent authors have also been known to use specialised and deliberately obscure terminology and grammar to hide patents.

## Tip 2.

Look for synonyms when using key words. For example, what a layperson calls vinegar, a chemist would call ethane carboxylic acid in dihydrogen monoxide (water).

## Tip 3.

When you perform a search using key terms, be aware that there are different ways to spell the same word, e.g. analyse and analyze.

## Tip 4.

Go beyond the titles to the abstracts of the patents or articles. It's best to broaden your search to at least include the abstract. Patent applications are required to have succinct, clear and descriptive abstracts. Searching just the titles of publications, patents, etc. can be misleading.

## Example A:

### Context specific meanings

The word "bridge" has several different meanings depending on the context.

For example in:

- **Construction:** it can mean to provide passage across a chasm or river, it can be for cars, rail, etc, it can be made of different construction methods e.g. suspension, cantilever, cable, etc.
- **Music:** a bridge is a contrasting section that contrasts with the rest of the composition.
- **Dental practices:** it can be a tool for filling gaps of missing teeth.

## Example B:

### Same thing different name

- A fossil fuel combustion heater is called a "boiler" in Europe and a "furnace" in the USA.
- Vegetables: courgette (UK)/zucchini (USA).
- Other food: crisps (UK)/chips (USA), biscuit (UK)/cookie (USA).

### Tip 5.

When you search the full text of patents, the risk of missing relevant documents is reduced, however there is a trade-off as you will receive an increase in the number of matched terms and, unfortunately, most will be irrelevant to your search.

### Tip 6.

Three steps to help you find the most relevant documents quickly when searching patent classifications are:

- i. Start by searching within the most relevant technical field for your technology solution.
- ii. Use that classification to find the most relevant patents, and
- iii. If there are too many results, the search can be refined using additional keywords and synonyms to narrow the results.

### Tip 7.

When searching by names of patent owners be aware of company structures, for example a patent may be held in the name of a holding company or parent company.



#### Note

Talk to your local IP Office for help with conducting searches and setting up alerts.

### Tip 8.

When searching by inventor names, be aware that there are many spelling variations of names and how a person may register it, for example:

- Spelling names: The same name can be spelt in different ways – Isabel or Isobel.
- The way a person may register their name on the patent application could change. For example, the following could all be the same person: Jack Smith; Smith, J; Smith, J.E; J.E. Smith; and Jack Elliot Smith. It is therefore important to remember to search all possible known variations of names.

### Tip 9.

Use citation searching if little is found or if the invention is difficult to describe.

### Tip 10.

The information available on patents is expanding quickly. Therefore, it is important to watch out for new publications entering patent databases and also monitor the evolution of the status of a particular patent as it progresses through its lifecycle. Several alerting and monitoring services are available on the market, and terminology with terms like “watch”, “tracker”, “alert”, “monitor”, etc., are used interchangeably to describe them.

Tips extracted from Clarke, N. (2018) The basics of patent searching. World Patent Information Vol 54 Supplement September 2018 pages S4-S10.

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