

Online Search Techniques



Below are techniques to help you find relevant results when using library databases and when using search engines (e.g., Google or Yahoo).

Identify Keywords

Create a list of keywords associated with your topic; consider synonyms or variant spellings. Use this list to help narrow search terms. Write them down and keep them with you throughout the research process.

Write down your topic: *Does television viewing encourage aggressive behavior in children?*

Write down the important words from your topic: **television, aggressive, behavior, children.**

Write down synonyms or related words from your list: **television**, *T.V.*; **aggressive**, *fighting, hostile, angry*; **behavior**, *action, attitude*; **children**, *kids, tweens, teens, etc.*

Now you have generated a useful list of keywords for finding resources!

Simple search: **television AND aggressive behavior AND children**

Exact Phrase Searching

To look for an exact phrase, type your phrase within **quotation marks** (" "). The results will contain the exact words in the quotation marks.

Example: **"attention deficit disorder"**

Truncation to Expand Your Search

Using an asterisk (*) or question mark (?) at the end of a root word (known as *truncation* or *stemming*), allows you to retrieve results containing any form of the root word.

Example: typing **teen*** will find **teen, teens, teenage, teenager, teenagers**

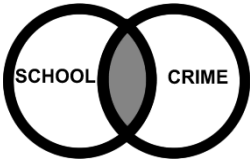
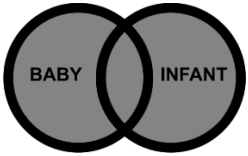
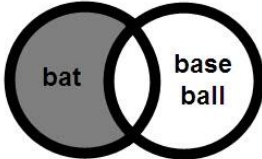
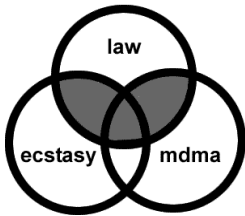
Note:

Most databases, such as the *Library Catalog*, *Academic Search Complete* and *Factiva*, use the asterisk (*) as the truncation symbol. Check the *Help* screen of the database you are using for the truncation symbol.

Some search engines, such as Yahoo, automatically search for all forms of a keyword (e.g., *teenager* will automatically find: *teen, teens, teenage, teenager, teenagers*).

Boolean Operators to Narrow or Broaden Your Search

Boolean searching is based on connecting keywords with three basic operators: **AND**, **OR** and **NOT**.

<p>AND</p> <p>The database or search engine will only retrieve those articles or web pages that contain both words. This will NARROW your search and DECREASE search results.</p> <p><i>Example: school AND crime</i></p>	 A Venn diagram with two overlapping circles. The left circle is labeled 'SCHOOL' and the right circle is labeled 'CRIME'. The intersection of the two circles is shaded gray, representing the results of the AND search.
<p>OR</p> <p>The database or search engine will retrieve those articles or web pages that contain at least one of these words. This will BROADEN your search and INCREASE search results.</p> <p><i>Example: baby OR infant</i></p>	 A Venn diagram with two overlapping circles. The left circle is labeled 'BABY' and the right circle is labeled 'INFANT'. The entire area of both circles is shaded gray, representing the results of the OR search.
<p>NOT</p> <p>Type NOT before a keyword to exclude that word from your search. Use NOT when you are searching for a keyword that may have multiple meanings.</p> <p><i>Example: bat NOT baseball</i></p>	 A Venn diagram with two overlapping circles. The left circle is labeled 'bat' and the right circle is labeled 'base ball'. The area of the 'bat' circle that does not overlap with the 'base ball' circle is shaded gray, representing the results of the NOT search.
<p>Combining Boolean Operators</p> <p>Use parentheses () to keep combination searches in order. In the example below, articles or web pages retrieved will contain the word <i>law</i> and at least one of the words in parentheses.</p> <p><i>Example: law AND (ecstasy OR mdma)</i></p>	 A Venn diagram with three overlapping circles. The top circle is labeled 'law', the bottom-left circle is labeled 'ecstasy', and the bottom-right circle is labeled 'mdma'. The intersection of the 'law' circle and the intersection of the 'ecstasy' and 'mdma' circles are shaded gray, representing the results of the combined search.

Still need help? Ask a librarian!

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