

Database Search Tips

◆The Basics

- Spell all words correctly
- Forget about capitalization & punctuation
- Learn how not to perform natural language searches: Hey, I want to look up some stuff on playing video games and if they are additive or not

◆Keyword Searching

What is it?

A computer program indexes "significant" words used within the title, summary (abstract), subject headings, or text of an article. All of these words are "searchable." When you type in one or more of these significant words into a search box, this is called Keyword Searching.

Advantages:

- You can find articles containing, distinctive words or (specialized) jargon.
Examples: *e-commerce*, *hip-hop*, *crossfit*, *skype*, *firewall*, "*genetic engineering*"

Disadvantages:

- You must search under a variety of words and word variations (brainstorm and/or use a thesaurus!).
Example: enter *child*, *children*, *kids*, *boys*, or *girls* for information on children
- You may get incorrect results or FALSE DROPS.
Example: if you are searching for the *psychological aspects of depression in children*, you may retrieve records that have nothing to do with your topic such as this title "*American Lives: Looking Back at the Children of the Great Depression*"

◆Ways to Make Your Searches More Precise

1. Use Boolean Operators

What are they?

Boolean operators are words (connectors) placed between search terms to narrow or expand a search. Always use Boolean operators when you search using more than one word or phrase at a time.

AND: Helps to Narrow a Search

The **and** operator tells the computer that both terms must be present in the record. The terms may or may not be in a phrase. The more terms that are linked with an **and** operator, the smaller the results will be.

Example: children

children and depression
children and depression and medication
children and depression and medication and Prozac

OR: Helps to Broaden a Search

The **or** operator is used for like or synonymous terms. Using it tells the computer that either (any) term must be present in the record. The more terms connected with the **or** operator, the larger the results will be.

Example: children or adolescents or teens or kids
(children or adolescents or teens or kids) and depression
(children or adolescents or teens or kids) and (depression or antidepressants)

NOT: Helps to Narrow a Search

The **not** operator eliminates an unwanted search term or group of search terms from the search results.

Example: **children not teens**

(children not teens) and depression

(children not teens) and depression not antidepressants

Boolean Operators -- Danger! Warning!

When you enter two search terms without using a connector (AND, OR, NOT), be aware that the database may **automatically** be set up to do one of three things.

1. **Implied AND:** Searches for records containing all of the terms.

Example: typing in *ozone layer depletion* may really mean *ozone AND layer AND depletion*

2. **Implied OR:** Searches for items containing any of the terms. (Often employed by Web search engines resulting in thousands of records.)

Example: typing in *ozone layer depletion* may really mean *ozone OR layer OR depletion*

3. **Implied Phrase Searching:** Searches for a phrase, i.e., 2 or more words that are adjacent and in the exact order.

Example: typing in *ozone layer depletion* may actually mean *ozone layer depletion*

If in doubt, use a Boolean operator!

2. Try Truncation!

What is it?

Truncation allows you to search the "root" form of a word with all its different endings by adding a symbol to the end of a word. Using truncation saves time, as you don't have to repeat searches with multiple variations of the same word.

Truncation: Helps to broaden a search.

Example: typing in *bank** will retrieve results with these words: **bank, banks, banking, bankers, bankruptcy**

The most common truncation symbol is the asterisk * but databases vary. Check the database Help section to find the correct truncation symbol.

Example: *bank* bank! bank# bank?*

3. Try Phrase Searching

What is it?

Phrase searching is a powerful way to retrieve specific information containing commonly used phrases. Phrase searching tells the computer to search for two or more words in the exact order in which they are entered. Different databases and search engines treat phrase searching in different ways. There are generally two ways to conduct a phrase search using a database:

1. Use quotations marks to enclose the phrase

Example: **"attention deficit disorder", "identity theft", "social media", "animal rights", "video games"**