

Slide 1 – Session 2 – Searching Concepts

Slide 2 – Topics Covered

In this session, I will be covering types of searches, choosing and narrowing a topic, devising a search strategy, and how Boolean search terms, parentheses, quotation marks and wildcard symbols function in online searching.

Slide 3 – Common search types

The most common types of online searches are the keyword search, the author search, and the title search.

Slide 4 – Keyword searches

Keyword searches are best to perform when you need information ABOUT something. It is the most dynamic type of online search, because it allows you to search on any terms, phrases, names, places, and so forth. Keyword searches find

terms in the most fields in the description records for resources. And, the list of results produced will contain the terms that were used in the search.

The search box on the library homepage, by default is for keyword searches. Type in appropriate search terms, hit enter or click on search.

Slide 5 – Author searches

Author searches are best to perform when you know the name of an author and you are looking to see what is available by that author. For author searches, you must enter at least the author's last name. For common names such as John Smith, it is helpful to include the author's first and middle names or initial as well. Author searches find information that exists only

in the author fields of resource description records, and they produce a list of resources by the author you have searched.

To do an author search, type A U colon, no space, then the author's name into the search box on the Library homepage.

Slide 6 – Title searches

Title searches are best to perform when you know the title of something you are looking for. You should enter at least part of the title in your search. Title searches find matching terms in only the title fields of resource description records, and they produce a list of results containing titles exactly or close to the title you entered.

To do a title search, type T I colon, no space, then the title you are looking for into the search box on the Library homepage.

Slide 7 – Choosing and narrowing a topic

Choosing and narrowing a topic can be one of the most difficult steps in starting the research process. People tend to choose topics that are too broad, and it is often a challenge to narrow down a topic enough to write about something that is informative and interesting beyond what is considered general or common knowledge about a topic.

Slide 8 – Choosing and narrowing a topic example

As a very simple example, using Sports as a broad topic area, you would probably want to choose a specific sport such as football. You might then choose a particular team. To narrow it down further, you could choose an individual player or position on the team. And, to narrow it even further, you could

focus on the incidence of common injuries among individual players or positions.

When you have trouble finding a narrow focus for a topic you are considering, it is helpful to begin searching for information on the broad topic. You can then examine the resources in the results and get some ideas that way.

For example, if you were interested in researching some aspect of 'homelessness', searching on homelessness as a broad term will bring up information about more specific aspects such as programs and services, healthcare, substance abuse, or mental illness.

Slide 9 – devising a search strategy

Once you have chosen and narrowed your topic, you should then devise a statement or a question that briefly summarizes

the topic. For example, “The effects of smoking on an unborn fetus” or as a question, “What are the effects of smoking on an unborn fetus?” Next, you should identify two or three major keywords in your statement or question, then list synonyms or other related terms or phrases beneath each of the keywords. You can use a Search Strategy Worksheet as shown on the next slide to map out your search. A copy of this worksheet is in your Session 2 handouts.

Slide 10 – devising a search strategy cont.

As you can see, smoking and unborn fetus are the major keywords in this research statement. Beneath each are listed synonyms or related terms, which will provide other possibilities of terms to search on to find information that addresses this topic. I will explain how AND, OR, and the

asterisk showing on this completed search strategy sheet
function in just a moment.

Slide 11 – Boolean terms

To connect the terms together in your searches, you may use the Boolean terms: AND, OR, and NOT. Please note that in the online catalog, these terms must be in all capital letters as shown here.

Slide 12 - AND

When you combine terms with AND, the results produced include all of the terms used in the search, and it eliminates results that have only single terms used in the search.

Searching with AND potentially produces fewer, more relevant results. In the example cats AND dogs, the intersection of the two circles on the diagram, represents the results of a search

when terms are connected with AND. Also note, that in online searching, AND is understood, so you do not really have to type it into the search. Typing in cats dogs will produce the same results as typing in cats AND dogs.

SLIDE 13 – AND cont.

Referring back to the example on the Search Strategy worksheet, use AND to connect terms going across the page.

Slide 14 - OR

Combining search terms with OR produces results containing ANY of the terms used in the search, together and separately.

If you remember the rhyme “OR gets more,” this is an easy way to remember what OR produces compared to using AND.

More results are produced, but relevance tends to decrease; therefore, in this context, more is not better. OR should be

used to combine synonyms or closely related terms, such as cats OR feline shown in the diagram. In this example, the diagram is completely shaded in, representing what the results will include. For the best results, combine synonyms or closely related terms using OR placed in parentheses, and then combine that phrase with unrelated terms using AND, such as in this example, in parentheses, smoking OR nicotine OR tobacco) AND pregnancy.

Slide 15 – OR cont.

Referring once again to the example on the Search Strategy worksheet, use OR to connect terms going down the page.

Slide 16 - NOT

Combining search terms with NOT is used to eliminate one or more specific aspects of a broader term in a search. In the

example shown, “cats NOT siamese,” this would be a logical search to perform if you were interested in finding information about any breed of cat other than siamese. In the diagram, the white area within the circle represents the results that would be eliminated by performing this search. You probably will not need to use this type of search much to begin with, but you should understand the concept behind how it works.

Slide 17 - Parentheses

Parentheses are used when combining multiple Boolean phrases in searches as shown in these examples. The parentheses function the same way here as they do in an algebraic equation, in order to have the terms combined with OR recognized as a set in the search. If the parentheses are

omitted, the results could include things that have no relevance at all.

Slide 18 – Quotation marks

Quotation marks should be placed around exact word combinations or phrases in searches when you want that word combination or phrase to be included in the results produced.

In the example “new mexico” AND politics, the quotation marks around new mexico ensure that new and mexico will appear together in the results produced. If the quotation marks were not placed around new mexico, the results could include irrelevant documents that have NEW and MEXICO separated from each other, thereby giving you results that include information about the country Mexico, rather than specifically the state of New Mexico.

Slide 19 – Wildcard symbols (truncation)

Wildcards are symbols used with terms in searches, in order to produce results that have multiple variants of the terms, without you having to do separate searches using the desired variants of a term. There are several wildcard symbols, such as the asterisk, the ampersand, and the hash mark, to name a few. The asterisk is one of the most commonly used wildcards, and it enables you to truncate a term.

Slide 20

To truncate a term, place an asterisk at the end of the root of that term, and the database will find all occurrences of terms beginning with that root word. For example, if you place an asterisk at the end of the term compute, the search will produce results that include compute, computes, computer,

computers, computerize, computerizes, computerized, and so forth.

You should always combine truncated terms with other relevant search terms as shown in the examples below.

Otherwise, you will get a lot of irrelevant results.

Slide 21 – Truncation cont.

Referring back to the example on the Search Strategy worksheet, P R E G N A N asterisk will include 'pregnant' 'pregnancy' and 'pregnancies' in the results. And, CIGAR with an asterisk will include 'cigar', 'cigars', 'cigarette', and 'cigarettes' in the results.

Slide 22 - Conclusion

In conclusion, practice makes perfect. Don't give up if your initial search attempts do not produce good results. Also, don't

necessarily settle for the results produced by the first searches you perform. You may find better, more relevant and useful information by trying a variety of searches. And, as always, ask for assistance at the library if you are having trouble finding the information you need.