

English 110-113 –
Information Literacy Session
#2
Searching Concepts

Agenda

- Types of searches
- Choosing and narrowing a topic
- Devising a search strategy
- Boolean operators
- Parentheses
- Quotation marks
- Wild cards (truncation)
- Sample searches

Most Common Types of Searches

- Keyword
- Author
- Title
- Subject

Keyword Search

- Best search to perform when you need information **about** something and you don't already know any titles or authors for the particular topic.
- Most dynamic search in the online environment
 - Uncontrolled vocabulary search
 - Allows use of any word or words (except common stop words), phrases, names, places, etc.
 - Searches the most fields in catalog/index records
- Will produce list of records containing the terms entered in the search

Author Search

- Best search to perform when you know the name of an author who you want to search
- Must enter at least the author's last name
 - May need to enter first and middle name/initial for common names such as John Smith
- Searches only the author fields in a catalog/index record
- Produces list of publications **by** the author you have searched

Title Search

- Best search to perform when you know the title of the publication you are looking for
- Requires that you enter at least part of the title
- Searches only the title fields in catalog/index records
- Produces list of resources with titles exactly or close to the title you entered

Subject Search

- Very similar to the keyword search and helps you find information **about** something
- A controlled vocabulary search
 - Terms entered must match terms in subject headings established by the Library of Congress or some other subject authority organization.
 - Terms may include persons, places, and things, or ideas.
- Produces list of publications about the subject you searched
 - If the search is on a person, the list of results includes publications both **about** and **by** that person.

Choosing and Narrowing a Topic

- This is perhaps the most difficult step in starting the research process.
 - The tendency is to choose topics that are too broad.
 - It is often a challenge deciding on enough of a narrow focus to produce an essay or research paper that is informative and interesting beyond what would be considered general or common knowledge about a topic.

Narrowing down your topic

- Sports
- Football
- Individual team
- Individual players/positions on the team
- Incidence of common injuries among individual players/positions

Devising a Search Strategy

- Once topic is chosen and narrowed, devise a statement or title for your topic that briefly summarizes your topic.
 - Example: “The effects of smoking on an unborn fetus”
- Extract two or three major concepts from your title/statement.
- List synonyms or other related terms/phrases underneath each of the major concepts.
- Use the Search Strategy Worksheet to map out your search.

Search Strategy Worksheet

Search Strategy Worksheet

1. Briefly summarize your search topic:

The effects of smoking on an unborn fetus

2. Divide your topic into major concepts. Write them on the bolded lines below, in order of their importance.

3. Under each major concept list synonymous or related terms/concepts.

First Major Concept	and	Second Major Concept	and	Third Major Concept
Smoking		unborn fetus		
or nicotine		or pregnancy		
or tobacco		or baby		
or cigarettes		or child*		
or _____		or infant		

Boolean Operators

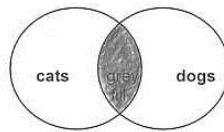
- AND
- OR
- NOT

Used to combine words and phrases in online keyword searches

Note: In *LIBROS/WorldCat Local* (the online catalog), Boolean operators must be capitalized.

AND

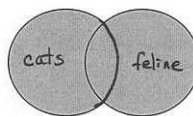
- Retrieves documents containing all terms specified in the search
- Eliminates documents that have only one of the terms specified in the search
- Potentially results in fewer more relevant documents
- Example : cats AND dogs – the intersection of the two circles represents the results of this type of search.



Note: In most online environments AND is understood, so you do not have to type it in the search.

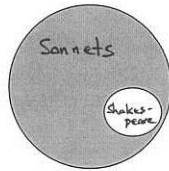
OR

- Retrieves documents containing any of the terms specified in the search, together and separately.
- “OR gets more”
- More documents are retrieved, but relevance tends to decrease.
- Should be used to combine synonyms or closely related terms
- Example shown below: cats OR feline – the shading in the diagram represents the results of this type of search.
- For the best results, combine synonyms or closely related terms, and then combine with unrelated terms using AND
 - Example: (smoking OR nicotine OR tobacco) AND pregnancy



NOT

- Eliminates specific aspects of a broader term or concept in a search
- Example: sonnets NOT Shakespeare – the white area within the circle represents the set of documents eliminated from this search. More specifically, you would be retrieving information about all sonnet authors represented in the database except Shakespeare.



Parentheses ()

- Use parentheses for combining multiple Boolean phrases.

Examples:

- (cats OR feline) AND instincts
- (cats OR feline) AND (instincts OR behavior)

Quotation marks “ ”

- Use quotation marks when searching exact phrases. This ensures that the results will show only documents that have the exact phrase in them.

Example:

- “new mexico” AND politics – without the quotation marks the results may include irrelevant documents that have NEW and MEXICO separated from each other within the document.

Wildcards (truncation)

- Used to retrieve all varying manifestations or forms of a word in one single search
- Many wildcard symbols exist
 - asterisk * - one of most used – used to truncate words
 - ampersand &
 - hash mark #
- To truncate a word, an asterisk (*) is placed at the end of the root of a word. The database will find all occurrences of words beginning with the root word.
- Example: compute*
 - Will find compute, computes, computer, computers, computerize, computerizes, computerized, etc.

Truncation cont.

- Always combine truncated terms with other relevant search terms using AND.
 - Example: compute* AND society
- If the number of hits is still high, add another relevant term
 - Example: compute* and society and elderly

Conclusion

- Practice makes perfect.
- Don't give up if your initial attempts don't produce good results.
- Don't necessarily settle for the results produced in your initial searches. You may find better, more relevant information by trying a variety of searches.
- Ask for assistance at the library.