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**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AND</strong></td>
<td>The database or search engine will only retrieve those articles or web pages that contain both words. This will <strong>NARROW</strong> your search and <strong>DECREASE</strong> search results.</td>
<td><em>school AND crime</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OR</strong></td>
<td>The database or search engine will retrieve those articles or web pages that contain at least one of these words. This will <strong>BROADEN</strong> your search and <strong>INCREASE</strong> search results.</td>
<td><em>baby OR infant</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NOT</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td><em>bat NOT baseball</em></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Combining Boolean Operators**

Use parentheses ( ) to keep combination searches in order. In the example below, articles or web pages retrieved will contain the word *law* and at least one of the words in parentheses.

*Example: law AND (ecstasy OR mdma)*

**Still need help? Ask a librarian!**

*library.reynolds.edu*