

BASIC SEARCH TIPS

These search tips will work for most search engines in their basic search option. **HINT:** Be sure to check the **HELP** screen to see which are applicable to the particular database/search engine being used.

1. **Phrases:** Place double quotation marks (“ ”) around phrases so that they will be searched as phrases and NOT as individual keywords.
EXAMPLE: “United States”
2. Put your most important keywords **first** in your search string.
3. **Case sensitivity: Type** the keywords and phrases in your search string in all small letters. Typing capital letters may only return exact matches. EXAMPLE: typing *president* retrieves both president and President
4. **Truncation:** * is the most common truncation symbol, which is used to look for variations in spelling and word form. EXAMPLE: *theolog** retrieves theology, theologies, theological, etc.
5. **Wildcards:** ? is the most common wildcard symbol, which may be used for finding different forms of words. EXAMPLE: *wom?n* will retrieve both woman and women.
6. **Advanced search option:** Often using the advanced search option may be more user friendly in terms of helping a researcher construct a search string with Boolean operators and to search within particular fields. However, avoid the **Expert search option** unless you really know how to use advanced search syntax, and know the search syntax for the particular search engine being used.
7. Searching keywords in the **Subject** field will generally produce more **relevant hits** in bibliographic databases. If you find a highly relevant book, article, etc.; do another search specifically for the main subject **heading** for that item.

8. **Boolean search operators: AND, OR, NOT** are the most common Boolean search operators.
- A. Find out whether AND or OR is the default setting for your search engine. AND is the most common default. HINT: Look in the HELP screen for the search engine or database.
 - B. The AND operator is used to limit searches by specifying that ALL of the words or phrase in your search string must appear in your search results. EXAMPLE: euthanasia AND moral AND “united states”
 - C. The OR operator is used to expand searches by looking for ANY of the words connected by OR. EXAMPLE: woman OR female OR girl
 - D. The NOT operator is also used to limit searches by specifying that the term after the NOT operator should not be in any of the search results. EXAMPLE: crime NOT murder
 - E. Use capital letters when typing Boolean operators AND/ OR in a search string. EXAMPLE: (anorexia OR bulimia) AND “united states”
 - F. When doing Boolean searches, always enclose OR statements in parentheses. The AND operator should not be used inside parentheses. EXAMPLE: (female OR wom?n) AND “graduate students”
9. **Implied Boolean searches:** Use the plus (+) and minus (-) signs in front of words to force their inclusion or exclusion in your search results. The (+) sign before a search term means that this term MUST be included in your search results. The (-) sign before a word means the word must not be included in search results. (There is **no** space between the sign and the keyword.)
EXAMPLE: +dyslexia +children –adults
10. **Stop words:** Most databases have stop words which are common words that are not indexed, , and therefore are ignored if used in a search. Some common stop words are: a, an, and, the, and or.