

## Searching for Information

A search strategy is the terms and Boolean logic you use to search a catalog, a database, or a search engine. It also involves using the right access points.

In this tutorial, you will:

- learn about using the right database, access points, and terms,
- learn about Boolean logic,
- learn about search tools, and
- learn tips to search the Internet.

To navigate, use the buttons in the lower right corner. They will take you to the next slide, back to the previous slide, additional information or back to the tutorial.

Created by V. McAsey 2006  
Updated January 2009



## Initial Questions

Before you begin searching for information, you should attempt to answer the following questions to help you focus your searching:

- ▶ What is it exactly that I am looking for?
- ▶ Where am I likely to find this information?
- ▶ What terms are likely to appear in the article, in the title, or on the page that I am looking for?



## Right Searching

Finding the right information depends on using the right:

- ▶ Database – library catalog, databases, search engines
- ▶ Access points – keyword, subject, title, author
- ▶ Terms – words typed in text boxes.



## Database

- ▶ What is the right database to use to find the information you want?
- ▶ What will provide the information needed?

When selecting a database, consider:

- the subject of your topic (e.g. education: use ERIC, nursing: use CINAHL, business: use ABI/INFORM or Business Source Premier)
- the format of the source that you want (e.g. books: use the library catalog or WorldCat, e-books: use NetLibrary, newspaper articles: use LexisNexis)
- the level of scholarship (e.g. general information: use the Internet)



## Access Points

Access points are the search fields available. Each database has some access points unique to it. But there are 4 access points common to every database.

- ▶ Keyword – any terms may be used; not all results may be relevant to topic
- ▶ Subject – search the database with the *exact* terms or phrases used by the database to describe a particular topic; all results relevant to the topic
- ▶ Author – search the database for the works by the author; use last name before first name
- ▶ Title – search the database for works that have terms or phrases in the title

Search  
Tip



## Tip - Access Points

Start with a keyword search. Find a couple of items that fit your topic. Look at the subject headings and use them in a subject search to find more relevant sources.

Example – I did a keyword search for “water pollution” and groundwater. The search retrieved 87 results. One of the results had the following record:



After looking at the subject headings, I added “Environmental Policy” to my search and used all subject access points. Seven results were retrieved that were more relevant to my information need.

Return to  
Tutorial

## Terms

- ▶ Identify concepts or keywords that are relevant to your topic.
- ▶ Are there any synonyms, slang, or related words that would work?
- ▶ Use Boolean logic to link terms into a search strategy.



## Boolean Logic

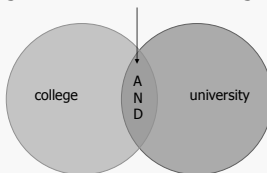
Boolean logic uses the words "and", "or", "not" to combine terms into a string of search terms.

- ▶ AND narrows a search [Click for Example](#)
- ▶ OR broadens a search [Click for Example](#)
- ▶ NOT limits a search [Click for Example](#)



## AND

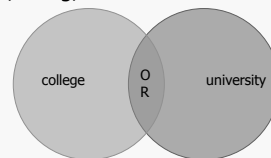
The search string "college and university" will retrieve only results with both terms, the overlapping center of the Venn Diagram.



[Return to Tutorial](#)

## OR

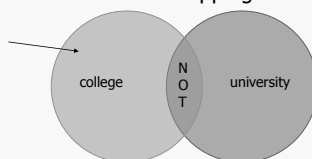
The search string "college or university" will retrieve results with both terms and each separate term, the entire Venn Diagram. OR is best used with synonyms, slang, or related terms.



[Return to Tutorial](#)

## NOT

The search string "college not university" will retrieve only results with "college" but not with "university", the "college" portion of the Venn Diagram minus the overlapping center.



[Return to Tutorial](#)

## Search Tools

Besides Boolean logic, terms may be connected using other search tools.




- ▶ Phrase Searching – place a phrase between quote marks ("") (e.g. "global warming")
- ▶ Truncation – using either an asterisk (\*) or a question mark (?) [depends on the database], place the symbol after the root of the word; example – educat\* will retrieve words: educate, educators, education, educates ...
- ▶ Wildcard – similar to truncation except will only replace one letter in word; use \* or ?; example – wom?n will retrieve words woman and women



## Search the Internet

You can use "and", "not", and phrase searching in search engines.

Click the buttons in the table for examples.

AND 	Default or use + in front of word to include term
NOT 	Use - in front of word to exclude term
"" 	Phrase is the most helpful search tool on the Internet. It allows for the search to retrieve more relevant results.



## Search the Internet - AND

<u>Terms used in Google</u>	<u># of Results</u>
Global warming	36,800,000
Global warming America	108,000,000
Global warming North America	8,030,000
"Global warming" "North America"	1,730,000
"Global warming" "North America" water	1,460,000

[Return to Tutorial](#)

## Search the Internet - NOT

<u>Terms used in Google</u>	<u># of Results</u>
"Global warming" "North America" water	1,460,000
"Global warming" "North America" water -lake	883,000

[Return to Tutorial](#)

## Search the Internet - Phrase

<u>Terms used in Google</u>	<u># of Results</u>
Global warming North America	8,030,000
"Global warming" "North America"	1,730,000

[Return to Tutorial](#)

## Word Order

Word Order matters when searching the Internet!

<u>Terms used in Google</u>	<u># of Results</u>
North global warming America	58,900,000
Warming global America north	5,950,000
Global warming north America	8,040,000



## Terms and Search Engines

- ▶ Search engines have a word limit so remove common or stop terms such as "the", "a", "of", "in", etc. If you need a stop term, put it in a phrase with quote marks or use the (+) in front of the term.
- ▶ Start a search as specific as possible and then get more general. Use as many terms as possible.
  - Helps prevent being overwhelmed by information.
  - Reason why search engines are not a great place to begin research in general topics.
  - Know what you want or need before searching the Internet!



## Conclusion

You have now completed the tutorial on searching for information.

If you have any questions, please ask a librarian.

- [Library Contact Directory](#)

