

Advanced Database Search Tips

Selecting Keywords

The most important part of searching a database effectively is to choose the right search terms or keywords. Generally 2-4 search terms are sufficient. The more search terms you use, the fewer results. Keywords can include important terms and also names of organizations or people.

Phrase Searching

Put quotation marks around phrases. This insures that the database (or search engine) looks for the phrase (all the words together) instead of searching on the individual words, for example:

“war on drugs”
“drunk driving”
“no child left behind”

Boolean Searching

Boolean searching is a way to link your search terms. If done properly, this can result in more precise and efficient searching. The two most commonly used Boolean operators are **AND** and **OR**.

AND Operator

Use AND to connect search terms when you want all the search terms to appear in the results. AND can be uppercase or lowercase, but it must be spelled out. For example:

vaccination and autism
texting and driving
facebook and cyberbullying

OR Operator

The OR operator is used to connect synonyms or related terms, for example:

teenagers OR adolescents
facebook OR social media
marijuana OR cannabis

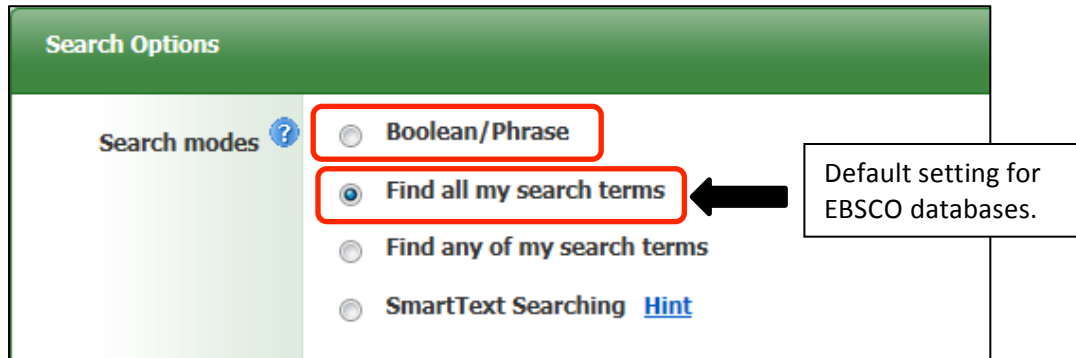
Nested Searches

If you are comfortable with Boolean searching, you can create quite complex search queries, combining search terms linked with OR to search terms linked with AND. This is called a nested search. In a nested search, put parentheses around the terms linked with OR, for example:

(teenagers OR adolescents) AND violence AND “video games”
(cyberbullying OR bullying) AND (facebook OR social media)

In the first example above, the database will look for any articles containing either “teenagers” or “adolescents” and then combine them with both “violence” and “video games.”

Not all databases require Boolean searching. In EBSCO databases, you can set the search mode. The default setting is to find all search terms, which means you don't need to connect search terms with AND. If you want to do a Boolean search, you need to select that search mode.



Complex Searches

If you're comfortable with Boolean searching, it's possible to create complex searches using truncation. However, if you are new to Boolean searching, you'll probably be more successful using basic searches, connecting search terms with AND. Here are some examples of complex Boolean searches:

(teen* OR adolescen*) AND violence AND video games
(GMO OR genetically modified foods OR transgenic crops) AND environ*

Databases that Require Boolean Operators

- **Opposing Viewpoints**
It isn't required to connect search terms with AND, but you may get better results using AND.
- **JSTOR**
- **Genderwatch**
- **Ethnic NewsWatch**

Truncation Symbols

Truncation symbols act as wildcards, allowing you to search for variant forms of a word with the same stem. The most common truncation symbol – used in all of our databases – is the asterisk, or *. The library catalog uses a dollar sign \$.

Examples:

child*	finds	child, children, children's etc.
teen*	finds	teen, teens, teenager, teenagers
environ*	finds	environment, environmental, environmentalism