KEYWORD SEARCHING & BOOLEAN OPERATORS

KEYWORD SEARCHING

Every online database, whether it is a library catalog, an article index, or an Internet search engine, allows you to do keyword searching. When you do a keyword search in one of the library’s article databases, the results you get back will consist of only those articles that have the words or phrases that you entered somewhere in the article. Doing a keyword search does not guarantee that you will find articles about your topic, it only guarantees that the words you entered appear somewhere in each of the articles retrieved--they could appear several times, or just once in the last paragraph. When doing a keyword search you should not enter your entire topic or thesis statement. The more words you enter in a search the fewer results you will get. Instead, you should pull out the main concepts or “key” words of your topic and enter those terms in your search.

BOOLEAN OPERATORS

Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) allow you to combine words or phrases in order to narrow or broaden your results when searching an online database.

Using AND to separate terms or phrases will narrow your search giving you only results that contain both of the words you entered (shaded area below). Remember, you will miss those articles that only mention anorexia or bulimia.

Using OR to separate terms or phrases-best used for synonyms or related terms-will broaden your search, giving you articles with either of the search terms you entered (shaded area below).

Using NOT* to separate terms will also limit your search. This is especially useful when you get results that are unconnected to your topic but that are commonly used in relation to one or more of your search terms. If you were writing a paper only about anorexia, and not about any other eating disorder, using NOT would eliminate any article that mentions bulimia. There is a down side to this, in that you will miss some articles that mention anorexia in addition to bulimia.

NESTING

If you use more than one Boolean Operator in the same search statement, you will need to group your keywords with parentheses to let the database know how you want the words combined. This is called nesting.

*Some databases use AND NOT (Lexis-Nexis) or ANDNOT in place of NOT. Also some systems are case sensitive, requiring you to use capital letters when using Boolean Operators. Make sure to look at the HELP or SEARCH TIPS screen of each database you are searching to find out the Boolean operators and rules specific to that database.