SEARCHING TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Keyword vs. Starts with (Alphabetical) Searches

Understanding the differences will help in determining when to use which one.

Keyword

- is the default search
- will retrieve results that contain the search term within the selected index
- search term can be anywhere in the selected index
- search term is exact (spelling counts!)
- can combine multiple terms in multiple indexes in a single search string
- presents results as records that can be sorted

Best uses:

- beginning steps in research
- when goal is to produce multiple records
- when creating Boolean search strings
- when using truncation and wildcard searches

Starts with (Alphabetical)

- index is based on the order that the letters appear in the field
- allows user to enter partial terms
- cannot be combined with any other indexes
- presents an alphabetized list of results with search term centered in the results list

Best uses:

- when looking for a specific item and the terms are known (i.e. Title or author are known)
- when verifying spelling, search term will appear in an alphabetized list and proper heading is likely to appear
- when browsing for the proper subject heading, the subject heading and its sub-divisions will display in an alphabetized list

Boolean Operators

Boolean operators are the foundation of good search strings. Using them effectively can dramatically change search results and save time.

AND operator

- retrieves results that contain both terms
- reduces the number of possible results
- e.g., (Christmas AND crafts) will find only those results that contain both terms. It will not retrieve results that contain only one of the terms
**OR operator**

- retrieves results that contain one or both terms
- increases the number of possible results
- e.g., (environment OR pollution) will retrieve results that contain at least one of the two terms. It will also retrieve those results that contain both terms.

**NOT operator**

- retrieves results that contain the first term but do not contain the second term
- reduces the number of possible results
- e.g., (senators NOT team) will retrieve results containing the first term, but will exclude those results that contain the second. Therefore, results about the hockey team will not be included in the result set.

**Truncation and Wildcards**

Truncation and Wildcards help to negotiate changes in spelling, plurals and multiple suffix choices. Each search engine may use different symbols for truncation and consulting the help files prior to constructing your search string will instruct how best to use these tools.

**Truncation (*)**

- used at the end of a term
- can replace a single letter or many letters
- when placed at the end of the term’s root, it will retrieve results for many suffixes
- e.g., (environment*) will retrieve results for the following terms: environment, environments, environmental, environmentalist, etc.

**Wildcard (?)**

- used in the middle of a term
- used to replace a single letter
- e.g., (wom? n) will retrieve results for the following terms: woman, women

**Using parentheses to combine tools**

Effective searchers will combine both Boolean operators and truncation symbols to fine tune a search string. Effective searchers will first try to retrieve the greatest number of possible results using truncation, wildcards and the OR operator and then use the AND and NOT operators to control and eliminate unwanted results. Placing parentheses around collections of terms will force that element of the search string be performed first.

**pioneer* OR frontier* NOT fiction**

Placing the parentheses around the first two terms forces the search engine to retrieve results that contain one or more of the following terms: pioneer, pioneers, pioneering, frontier, frontiers, etc. The NOT operator will take the results of the search within the parentheses and then remove any results that contain the term fiction.