Searching Techniques

When searching online or in an academic database, you will be asked to enter terms into a search field. Creating an effective search can take some practice, but here are some basic searching tips that may help you find what you need.
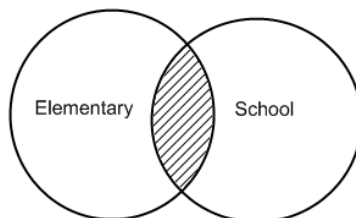
1. Include Boolean Terms

Three basic terms, AND, OR, and NOT, can make your search more effective. These are sometimes referred to as 'Boolean terms,' referring to a searching method entitled 'Boolean Searching.'

AND

Connect search terms/keywords with AND if you need search results with both terms.

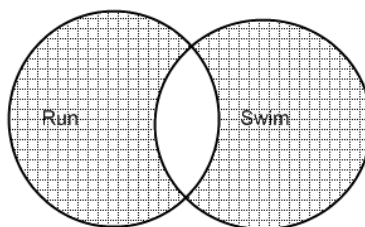Example: if searching for Elementary School, use Elementary AND School

OR

Connect search terms/keywords with OR if you need to conduct a broader search.

The OR connector works great with common synonyms.

Example: if searching for Exercising, you might use Exercise OR Run OR Swim
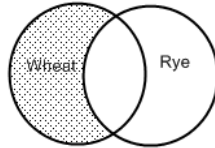
NOT

Connect search terms/keywords with NOT if you need to narrow your search.

Example: if searching for material on wheat bread but not rye bread, you could search

Wheat NOT Rye

2. Use Truncation, Parentheses and Quotations to broaden or narrow your search.

Truncation and Wildcards

You can use symbols such as * or ? to broaden your search.

Use **?** as a **wildcard**—use it as a replacement for any letter in a word.

Example: m?n will find results for men and man

Use ***** as a **truncation** symbol—use it as a replacement for the end of a term.

Example: teach* will find results for teaching and teacher

Parentheses

Boolean terms are handled in a specific order: first NOT, then AND and finally OR. To change this order, use

parentheses, just like in algebra:

(bird OR hawk) AND Texas

(cat AND dog) NOT pet

Quotations

Grouping search terms within quotation marks will search the terms as a phrase.

Example: "researching dyslexia" will find results only with that exact phrase.