

“Information You Can Trust”

Alverno College Library

Search Techniques for TOPCAT and Electronic Databases

Before going online, it's useful to divide a complex topic into separate concepts. This will help focus your research and identify key terms or **keywords** to use in searching TOPCAT or an electronic database. It's usually a good idea to select a few similar terms (synonyms) as keyword or subject terms for each concept that you are researching.

EXAMPLE SEARCH: How does a woman's marital status impact her financial security?

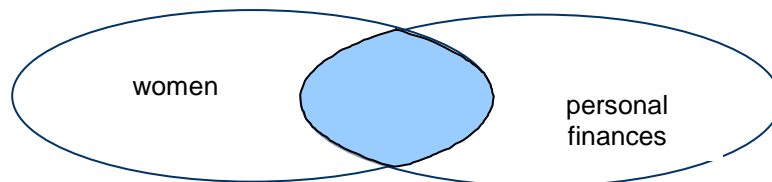
CONCEPT 1	CONCEPT 2	CONCEPT 3
women females	single marital status unwed	financial planning retirement planning personal finances

Once you have selected your search terms, you're ready to do a **KEYWORD** search.

Boolean What? Boolean Operators!

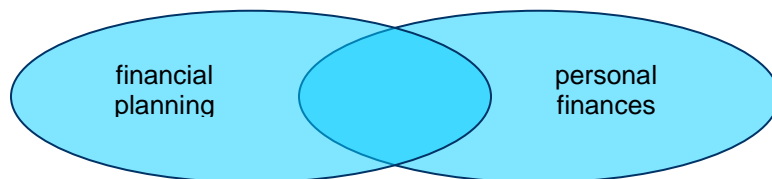
Boolean operators are used in more advanced keyword searching. They allow you to broaden or narrow your search using **AND** or **OR**.

AND



Using **AND** will **NARROW your search** and give you fewer results because it will retrieve only those items that include both or all of your search terms. The results of the above search would include materials regarding women **AND** their personal finances.

OR



Using **OR** will **EXPAND or broaden your search** and give you more results because it will retrieve items containing either or both of your search terms.

The results of the above search would include all materials on either financial planning **OR** personal finances.

REMEMBER!!

Although all search engines on the Web may not use Boolean operators, they can be extremely useful when searching TOPCAT and electronic databases!

Advanced Searching Techniques (primarily used in databases & with some search engines)

TRUNCATION

WHAT IS IT? Truncation is another word for **abbreviating** your search term. It allows you to **EXPAND or increase** the number of results you retrieve. To truncate a term you must enter in part of your search term and end it with a truncating **symbol**. Often the asterisk (*) is used to truncate words, but it may also be another symbol such as a question mark (?).

Examples: **women and financ***

This search will retrieve articles having the term **women** as well as any terms beginning with **financ** like **finances, financing, financial**, etc.

company and mentor*

This search will retrieve articles that have the term **company** in them as well as terms beginning with **mentor** like **mentors, mentoring, mentorships**, etc.

WHEN TO USE: Use truncation when you are not retrieving a lot of results using a particular term. However, *be careful not to truncate a word prematurely or truncate a word that has a common prefix!*

Example: **compan* and mentoring**

While this search would retrieve articles with words like *mentoring* and *company* (or *companies*) in them, it could also produce items containing words like *companions, companionship*, etc.

NESTED SEARCHING

WHAT IS IT? Nested searches are advanced searches that make use of *multiple search terms* at the same time in order to **INCREASE** your final search results. **PARENTHESES are required when doing a nested search.**

Examples: **women and finances and (single or unmarried)**

This search statement will retrieve articles that have the terms **women** and **finances** in them in addition to either the term **single** or **unmarried**.

mentor* and (job satisfaction or motivation)

This search statement will retrieve any articles containing terms like **mentoring, mentorship**, etc. in addition to having either the term **job satisfaction** or **motivation** in them.

WHEN TO USE: Use nested searches **after** you have tried Boolean and/or truncated searches and are still not getting adequate search results.

REMEMBER: **Be sure to select the most appropriate database(s) for your topic! If you need help formulating a good search statement, don't hesitate to ask a Reference Librarian.**