Search Techniques for TOPCAT and Electronic Databases
https://www.alverno.edu/media/alvernocollege/library/pdfs/techniques.pdf

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT 1</th>
<th>CONCEPT 2</th>
<th>CONCEPT 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>women females</td>
<td>single marital status</td>
<td>financial planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unwed</td>
<td>retirement planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personal finances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.