3. Entering Keywords

Learn how to use Boolean operators (AND, OR and NOT) to improve your search results.

Using what are called Boolean operators to join keywords and phrases is an important part of creating a good search strategy. They help you focus a search when you have too many results and broaden it when you bring back too few.

**Using AND or OR**

Learn how to use AND to find fewer but more relevant results. And learn about using OR to create a more comprehensive search.

The AND operator will focus your search and bring back fewer results. Usually you will join keywords around different topics with this operator. For example, if you join the words grief and bonds and Bowlby you will only see results with all three keywords i.e. Grief AND Bonds AND Bowlby. The more terms you join with AND the fewer more relevant results you’ll retrieve.

Use the OR operator when you want to join similar words or synonyms to look for a topic. For example, different authors could use the terms grief of loss or bereavement to discuss the same concept so you would need to use all three of these words in your search. Using an OR operator between search term means you will bring back results with at least one of those words i.e. Grief OR Loss OR Bereavement. The more words you join with the OR operator the wider and more comprehensive your search will be.

**Using AND + OR**

Learn about combining AND and OR to create both a relevant and comprehensive search.

Most often you will need to use a combination of AND and OR. In order to join two sets of keywords together you must use brackets around the synonyms i.e. (Grief OR Loss) AND (Cope OR Exposure). A combination search will bring back to most comprehensive and relevant results on your topic.
Using Not

Learn how to use NOT to filter your search and make it more relevant.

Use the NOT operator to exclude results containing a particular word. For example, if you use the word loss in your search you may retrieve results which include weight loss. Creating a search which includes NOT weight will exclude all results which contain this keyword i.e. (Grief OR Loss) NOT Weight. Using NOT will back a smaller more relevant set of results.

Tutorial Checklist

- I can see how Boolean operators limit or expand search results.
- I am able to use Boolean operators to create a search string.

Ask a librarian