Creating Search Statements

This guide demonstrates how to create search statements for use in research tools like library databases, online catalogs, and search engines.

Creating Search Statements

Search engines like Google allow you to type a question or sentence directly in the search box. This won’t work in the library catalog or databases. Instead, use **keywords**, **phrase searching** and **Boolean terms**. Boolean terms (AND, OR, NOT) are used to either narrow or broaden your pool of results. Boolean terms usually appear in all uppercase letters to distinguish them from the keywords. Some search tools require capitalized Boolean terms.

Phrase Searching

Enclose phrases, proper names, and titles with quotation marks. Adding quotations keeps all the words together so the search engine, database, or library catalog does not search for them as individual words.

**Examples:**
- physical activity → "physical activity"
- Affordable Care Act → "Affordable Care Act"
- Ernest Hemingway → "Ernest Hemingway"

Boolean Term: AND

Use **AND** to connect keywords and narrow results. Select a keyword for each separate concept in your thesis, and then connect them with an AND. Remember, every time you add a word you narrow your search and receive fewer results. If you have too few results, eliminate keywords or substitute others.

**Examples:**
- "weight lifting" AND obesity
- exercise AND health AND elderly
- "physical activity" AND diabetes AND "aging adults"

Boolean Term: OR

Use **OR** to search with synonyms and expand results. With OR, you tell the search system that you are equally interested in multiple terms. This is an ideal search strategy to use with synonyms and is very effective when combined with an AND term.

**Examples:**
- "physical activity" OR exercise
- elderly OR "aging adults" OR "older adults"
- running OR cardio AND obesity

Boolean Term: NOT

Use **NOT** to eliminate unwanted keywords. This is helpful to eliminate topics that change the results. For example, if you want to know about manatees around the word, but not Florida manatees specifically, you can search for "manatees NOT Florida" to eliminate results that mention Florida. NOT can be used with AND or OR. Just make sure NOT comes after the keyword you want to keep and before the keyword you want excluded.

**Examples:**
- exercise NOT "weight lifting" → walking NOT running AND obesity
- exercise OR "physical activity" NOT teenagers

*Some search tools use a minus sign (-) instead of NOT to eliminate keywords.*