

College of Applied Science Library

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Basics of Database Searching

As you need to find books, articles, Web sites, and other external information, you will need to use some type of database, including a library catalog, research database or search engine. Databases have special commands and features that can increase your ability to locate useful information. Incorporating these techniques into your day-to-day searching will save you time and make your information research process more efficient.

When searching in databases, first think about your topic in terms of *keywords* and *key phrases*. Identify synonyms, related terms and alternate phrases. Also, check your spelling carefully, and most databases do not check this for you!

Make *relationships* between these keywords and key phrases by using **Boolean operators**. These special commands create *search phrases* that can be interpreted by the database system.

Sample research question: *Can I contract salmonella from handling a pet turtle?*

<u>Operator</u>	<u>Function and Sample Search Phrase</u>
AND	Requires all terms to be in the records retrieved (can also be a + sign) Ex: <i>turtles AND salmonella</i> ; <i>+turtles +salmonella</i>
OR	Allows either term to appear Ex: <i>turtles OR reptiles</i>
NOT	Excludes term following operator (can also be a – sign) Ex: <i>Salmonella NOT “food poisoning”</i> ; <i>Salmonella -“food poisoning”</i>
()	Define functions to be performed first Ex: <i>(turtles OR reptiles) AND (salmonella NOT “food poisoning”)</i>
“ “	Maintains phrase in order presented Ex: <i>“food poisoning”</i>
*	Create a shorter word stem with a variable ending Ex: <i>poison*</i> (includes poison, poisons, poisoning)

(Note: Use the NOT operator very carefully. It can remove good results that simply contain the undesired keyword.)

Searches based on keywords work well when you are first exploring a topic. Keyword searches are limited, however, since they locate the desired words without any context. Once you find some very relevant books or articles, however, you can use *subject* terms or other limiters to focus your search based on topic.

Subject terms describe what a book, article, or other resource is about, and a search by subject provides fewer results than a keyword search. Subject terms usually appear when the full citation record is displayed, and are often underlined and hyperlinked. Clicking here will result in a list of related subjects or articles. Other database fields, such as author, may also be hyperlinked to assist in locating related items.