SEARCHING TECHNIQUES

Below are some searching techniques that can help you with the Library's online catalog, article databases, or Web search engines. Not every searching technique works with every catalog, database or search engine – but these will work with most.

A. Omit unnecessary words

communism ~~in~~ Romania seniority ~~in the~~ senate

~~effects of~~ caffeine ~~on the~~ memory ~~of~~ mice

"In" is an especially bad word to include, as some computer systems interpret it as commanding them to look for certain information in a particular field.

B. Capitalization

Doesn't matter unless it does

Doesn't matter with the NMSU catalog or article databases
Does matter with some Web search engines

Texas texas

C. Put quotation marks around phrases

Only works with phrases that are commonly used as phrases

"animal rights" "united states"
"treaty of paris" "sound and the fury"

D. Truncation

Allows you to search at one time for words with similar endings – any one of which could be relevant to the topic

librar*
librarian
librarians
library
libraries
librarianship

psycholog*
psychology
psychologist
psychologists
psychological

Truncation symbols vary by database. There is no standard symbol – although it is usually something along the lines of *, !,$, #.

Do not truncate a word unless you have a distinctive stem – one that keeps you within the same word family.

E. Wildcards

Allows you to search for possible variations (often spellings) within words

wom*n → woman, women

Symbols for indicating wildcards vary.
Fewer databases support wildcards than support truncation.

F. AND

Allows you to connect two or more search words or phrases. Effective way to narrow searches and lessen the number of results.

cats AND diet
teenager* AND "binge drinking"
"european union" AND "single currency"

Some databases allow you to use the AND command without capitalizing, others do not.

G. OR

Allows you to search for several variants on a search concept at one time. Works best with keyword searches.

"european union" OR EU
e-commerce OR ecommerce OR "electronic commerce"

It's usually best to use OR only in the same search with an AND command. (See nesting, #H, below.)

H. Requiring or Excluding Words

+ requires that all items in a list of search results contain certain words or phrases

"water rights" +texas
cloning +legality

- requires that none of the items in a list of results contains the excluded word or phrase

dolphins -football
"lord of the rings" -movie -film

Do NOT include a space between the + or - sign and the search word following it.

I. Nesting

The order of search terms linked by AND and OR can make a bigger difference. Most computers will go from left to right processing things in the order they come to them -— so it's important to indicate any units you might want the computer to consider together.

cats OR felines AND diet ≠ diet AND cats OR felines -- Thus, diet AND (cats OR felines) is a better way to phrase this.

J. Limits

Allow you to restrict results to items meeting certain criteria – for example,

- Being of a particular type (newspaper articles versus journal articles)
- Being in a particular language (English, Spanish, French, etc.)
- Being published/produced within a particular time frame (1995-2000)

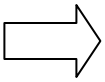
K. Field searching

Allows you to search for information within particular fields within a record:

- Title
- Author
- Abstract

L. Proximity commands

A variety of commands that allow you to search for words that, while not always appearing as exact units, often appear close to each other.

george w/1 bush  gets George Bush as well as George W. Bush

Examples include NEAR, ADJ (=Adjacent), and W (=Within) followed by a unit of measure