



ELECTRONIC RESEARCH BASICS

I. Basic Features

A. Keyword vs. Subject Searches

Keyword – searches any word(s) you enter anywhere within the database (text, title, notes, author, etc.)

Subject – searches the subject terms assigned by a cataloger or an indexer, allowing you to find all resources on a topic under one heading

What's the difference?

SUBJECT	KEYWORD
narrows a search	broadens a search
uses a subject term	uses any word
searches only the subject field	searches all fields
does not allow combining terms	allows Boolean combinations

B. Combination Searches (Boolean) Allows you to connect two or more search words or phrases

- **AND** (narrows: cats and dogs)
- **OR** (broadens: cats or feline)
- **NOT** (eliminates: cats not dogs)

Nesting (When using OR with either AND or NOT, use parentheses around the OR terms to clarify relationships)

- (cats or feline) and diet

C. Limiting (Restricts results to items meeting certain criteria)

- date or date range
- language
- publication type
- peer reviewed or refereed (scholarly)

D. Truncation (Allows searching for word variations)

- Truncation symbols vary by database. Common symbols include: * ! ? \$
 - politic* (politics, political, politician, politicians, etc.)

II. Effective Search Statements

A. Omit unnecessary words

- ~~Effect of television violence on children~~

B. Use AND/OR with Nesting and Truncation

- (television or tv) and violen* and child*

ELECTRONIC DATABASE SEARCH TIPS

- **Read the instructions** (Help screen) to figure out how the database works
- **Define your topic**
 - List as many different terms/synonyms to describe as possible
 - List any subtopics
- **When doing a keyword search**, find a book or article that is right on target, look at the subject terms assigned to that item and re-do the search using those terms.
- **Find too few? None? Out-of-context?**
 - Use different search terms, synonyms
 - Use truncation
 - Broaden your search with OR
- **Find too many?**
 - Use more specific terms
 - Limit by language, publication, date, etc.
 - Use subject terms
 - Narrow your search with AND
- **Check your spelling**
- **Search a different database**
- **Ask for help**
- **Allow enough time to obtain needed resources. Not everything is available full text on the computer!**