DATABASE RESEARCH BASICS

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?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>KEYWORD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>narrows a search</td>
<td>broadens a search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses a subject term</td>
<td>uses any word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>searches only the subject field</td>
<td>searches all fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>does not allow combining terms</td>
<td>allows Boolean combinations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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: * ! ? $
  
  For example: politic* will include these results: politics, political, politician, politicians.

E. Creating 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*
RESEARCH TIPS

• Read the instructions (Help screen) to understand how each database works
• Define your topic
  ▪ List as many different terms and synonyms as possible
  ▪ List any subtopics
• When doing a keyword search
  ▪ Find a book or article that is exactly right for your topic
  ▪ Look at the subject terms assigned to that item
  ▪ Re-do the search using those subject terms
• Too few results? None? Not on topic?
  ▪ Check your spelling
  ▪ Use different search terms, synonyms
  ▪ Use truncation
  ▪ Broaden your search with OR
  ▪ Search a different database
• Too many results?
  ▪ Use more specific terms
  ▪ Limit by language, publication, date, etc.
  ▪ Use subject terms
  ▪ Narrow your search with AND
• Ask for help
  ▪ Come to the Library Research desk
  ▪ Call us at 309-796-5147
  ▪ Email us at libraryref@bhc.edu
• Allow enough time to obtain needed resources. Not everything is available in our Library or full text online in the databases!