

Database Searching with Boolean Operators

To find relevant resources, it is important to search in a way that databases will understand. Database search screens may differ from each other, but they typically use the same basic commands to logically connect search terms. These commands are known as **Boolean operators**. Database advanced search screens often make these operators easier to use. If you know how to use these commands, you can be much more precise and effective in your searches.

There are three main Boolean operators: **AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**.

AND, OR and NOT tell the database how to group your search terms and in what order to search for each. They can be used individually to join two terms, or they can be used in combination, to create more complex search statements.

AND

AND is used to retrieve documents that include all search terms connected by the operator. AND will **narrow** a search and **limit** the number of documents retrieved.

For example, a search for *football AND soccer* will only retrieve items that contain **all** football soccer present in the same item retrieved. Each new term added to a search with AND will further limit the results.



OR

OR is used to retrieve all documents that include any search terms connected by the operator. OR will **broaden** a search and **expand** the number of documents retrieved. You can use OR to include synonyms or terms that are similar or related in meaning. Be careful to use it between words that can be substituted for each other and still find relevant results.

For example, a search for *football OR soccer* will retrieve any results that contain **either** of the words entered. This means either or document, but not present. necessarily.

Need Help?

Boolean operators, particularly AND and OR, can be extremely helpful to increase your searching precision so you get more relevant results from database searches.