



# LIBRARY RESEARCH GUIDES

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## Databases and E-Resources: Search Tips

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### What is a Database?



A library database is both an electronic catalog and the access point to information from published works, such as magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias, journals and other resources.

- Library databases provide access to authoritative information sources.
- Library databases provide access to resources across a wide spectrum of topic and subject areas.
- Library databases provide access to many years worth of published information at no cost to students.
- Library databases allow to limit or expand your search results by using the Boolean operators AND, OR, NOT.

- Library databases give you citation information to help you locate and cite the articles.
- Library databases give you an abstract or summary to tell you what the article is about.
- Most Library databases provide articles in full-text or PDF format.

[?](#) Need help searching? See our [Guide to Database Searching](#) for helpful tips!

*A special note: For historical research, the Library also has print indexes that must be used to find older articles, generally anything published before 1985.*

### Choosing Keywords



**Before you get started on your research, it's a great idea to brainstorm a list of keywords for all the key concepts in your research question.**

Try some of these steps in thinking of keywords:

- Define your topic - You can't research or write about a topic if you can't articulate what it is.
- Try writing your topic down as a sentence or a question
- Think of keywords to describe each concept involved in your topic
- Focus on synonyms and related terms. What are other ways to state your topic? Is there a specific word that will describe an abstract concept in your topic?

Sample topic: *Does the death penalty unfairly target minorities?*

**Concept 1:** *death penalty*

**Alternative Terms:** *capital punishment, execution*

**Concept 2:** *unfairly targeting minorities*

**Alternative Terms:** *discrimination, racism, prejudice*

**Alternative Terms:** *African-American, Hispanic, ethnic groups*

### Keyword vs. Subject Headings



#### Keyword Search? or Subject Headings?

**Keyword search** allows you to use your own words to describe what you're looking for. This is how you typically search the Web using search engines like Google or Bing.

**Subject headings** describe the content of an item using terms that are standardized across a database. A subject heading search will return all items on that topic in a database.



**Your results using Subject Headings will be more precise than a Keyword search!**

To find out whether a particular database uses subject headings, look for a link labelled *Thesaurus* or *Subject Terms*. Many databases allow you to search or browse their subject headings.

#### How do I find subject headings?

- Start with a keyword search, using words/phrases that describe your topic.
- Browse the results; choose 2 or 3 that are relevant.
- Look at the Subject or Descriptor field and note the terms used (write them down).
- Redo your search using those terms.

### Useful Guides

- Choosing a Topic
- i** Below are more useful guides to help you with your research:

- Finding Articles
- Finding Books
- Logging In
- Research Basics

#### DATABASE TUTORIALS:

- EBSCOhost
- GALE (GVRL/Opposing Viewpoints)
- Proquest

### Talk to a Librarian

#### Need Help [?](#)

The Cerritos College Librarians can help you with your research in a variety of ways:

- In person
- By email
- By phone
- Chat

Librarians are available during [library hours](#) to answer your questions by phone or chat.

(562) 860-2451 x2425

#### Chat with a Librarian

Name (leave blank for anonymous)

[Start Chat](#)



# LIBRARY RESEARCH GUIDES

Library Homepage / LibGuides / Databases and E-Resources / Boolean Searching

## Databases and E-Resources: Boolean Searching

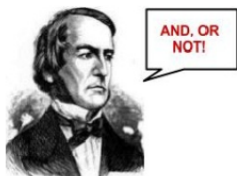
- Databases A-Z
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### What is Boolean Searching??

Boolean searching uses **AND**, **OR**, or **NOT** to refine a search.

- connect your search words together to either narrow or broaden your set of results
- focus a search, particularly when your topic contains multiple search terms.
- connect various pieces of information to find exactly what you're looking for

### Fun Fact!



George Boole (1815–1864) was an English mathematician and philosopher who came up with Boolean Logic. Boolean search connectors are a subset of Boolean Logic.

### Pirates vs. Ninjas

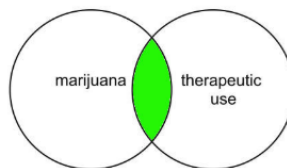
An introduction to the basics of Boolean operators. Created by Lincoln Memorial University.



### Using AND

Use **AND** in a search to:

- narrow your results
- tell the database that **ALL** search terms must be present in the resulting records

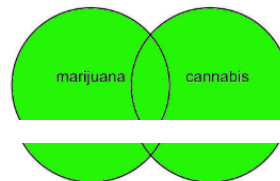


Example: marijuana AND therapeutic use

### Using OR

Use **OR** in a search to:

- connect two or more similar concepts (synonyms)
- broaden your results, telling the database that **ANY** of your search terms can be present in the resulting records

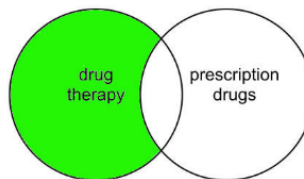


Example: marijuana OR cannabis

### Using NOT

Use **NOT** in a search to:

- exclude words from your search
- narrow your search, telling the database to ignore concepts that may be implied by your search terms



Example: drug therapy NOT prescription drugs