Search Techniques
Key Points

Techniques

phrase searching “ “
  o combines terms so that they are found next to one another and in the same order
  o use double quotation marks eg. “New York Stock Exchange”

wildcards / truncation * ?
  o search for alternate spellings or to search for variant forms of the term
  o use * or ? usually; eg. Canad* will pick up Canada or Canadian or Canadians
  o use carefully, using a root that is too short will pick up un-useful terms

boolean operators

AND
  o use to combine terms in a search
  o narrows a search by requiring that both terms be in the results eg. "Genetic engineering and food production"

OR
  o broadens a search by looking for either of the words eg. Women or females

NOT
  o narrows a search by eliminating a certain aspect of a topic eg. "Shakespeare not tragedies"
  o use very carefully

()  
  o you can combine all of the operators for a more precise search eg. "Pollution and (lakes or rivers) not oil"
Hints

When you get too many results

- focus your search by adding more terms
  If your search for love and shakespeare finds too much, try Love and shakespeare and comedies

- limit the terms to a specific field
  If searching for irony and shakespeare yields too much to handle, try irony in de and shakespeare in de

- limit the results by publication date
  All databases have a publication date limit, use it.

- limit your results to a particular publication type
  Most databases include more than just articles, eg theses, books, etc.

When you get few or no results

- reduce the number of elements in your search
  If the search for "examples of unrequited love in Shakespeares plays" yields nothing, try unrequited and shakespeare and plays

- truncate the search term
  If there are no results for an author search for Browning Jeffrey, try Browning J or Browning J*

- check your spelling
  you may have typed it incorrectly or used the wrong spelling. It may not be Jeffrey Browning, it might be Geoffrey Browning

- reduce one element and add another
  Search for Browning in the author field and a word from the title of the article

- use alternate words for the topic
  If you don't find anything for women and flattery, try (Women or woman or females or girls) and flattery

- search for keywords rather than an exact subject search
  If your subject search for Victorian poetry doesn't give results, try a keyword search for Victorian poetry

- see if there is a more appropriate database
  Most databases deal with very specific subjects, for example PsycINFO does psychology, Sociological Abstracts does sociology and so on

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