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 <u>too many</u> 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 <u>few or no</u> 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