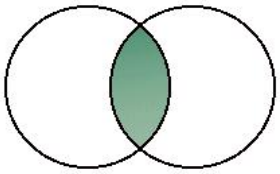
How to Use Search Syntax

This guide discusses various techniques used for searching a library catalog or online research databases.

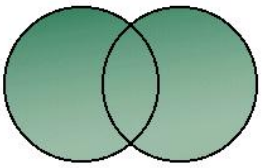
Boolean Searching
A basic way to search is to use Boolean operators. Boolean logic refers to the logical relationship among search terms. The Boolean search operators are **AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**. **AND** and **NOT** are sometimes depicted as a **+** for required search words and a **–** for prohibited search words. Some search engines and databases in the keywords mode will automatically perform the search using **AND**.

cats **AND** dogs



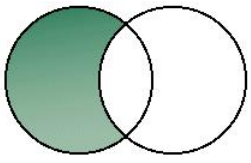
Retrieves items that contain both terms.

cats **OR** dogs



Retrieves items that contain either term.

cats **NOT** dogs



Retrieves items that contain only one term.

Wild Card
Allows for the substitution of a symbol (using either * or ? or !) for a letter or letters when a word varies internally.

wom?n would retrieve woman and women

Grouping Terms
You can group synonyms by using parentheses. For example: (cats or dogs)

Some systems will allow you to use your search history (normally called r1 for results 1, r2 for results 2, etc.) and combine two unrelated searches using AND or OR: (**r1 and r2**).

Proximity Operators
You can limit your search so that the terms have to be within a certain number of words from each other by using the **number** operator. For example, **cats N4 dogs** would find all instances of "cats" within four words of "dogs" no matter the order or intervening words.

The **within** operator allows for searches where the search term is within a given number of words. For example **cats w2 dogs** would only render cats and dogs in phrases there they are not separated by more than two words such as:

cats and dogs cats or dogs

Command Line Searching
Each record in a database is made up of many fields that contain information about title, author, publication date, abstract, text, etc. Command line searching is the ability to limit the search to those specific fields by using abbreviated codes for those fields, e.g. **au** for author, **ti** for title, **py** for publication year, **dt** review.

A typical command line search might look like this:

au Michael AND **ti** "gone with the wind" AND **dt** review

Please note: *LUTHER* does not support command line searches. Default search parameters are built into the OPAC. Use these features for best results.

Need Help?
Every database provides some form of help. Also use Research Library Complete in ProQuest to obtain more detailed search instructions.