

Basic Searching: Part 2

Searching for information in databases can be intimidating because all databases are a bit different. The good news is that most databases have the same key features.

Think of which database to use for your search. If you want to find books, search the library's catalogue. If you want to find journal articles, search research databases.

All databases have at least one search box, but you can often switch to an advanced search option or add rows to search in more boxes.

The boxes are then connected with Boolean terms, like AND, OR, NOT.

Using AND will connect terms and narrow your search.

Using OR will expand your search.

And using NOT will exclude a term.

The boxes might also be labeled by information type such as "author", "title", or "keyword." For instance, you could search for:

| | | |
|-----|-------------|-----------|
| | Henry VIII | as title |
| AND | Shakespeare | as author |
| NOT | Dryden | as author |

This search will look for the title Henry VIII by Shakespeare and not by Dryden.

Or you could search for:

| | | |
|-----|--------------|---------------|
| | "class size" | in all fields |
| AND | grade* | in all fields |
| OR | mark* | in all fields |

This search will look for results about the relationship between class sizes and student achievement.

For a subject search like this, you will probably want to do a broad search in all fields, instead of narrowing your search too much by selecting title or abstract for instance.

Remember that searching often requires more than one try, so switch up your keywords, the way you connect them, or the database you're using – especially if the topic is multidisciplinary.

Watch the next video in this series for information on how to refine your search results in a database.

And if you have any questions about the features of a database or about this video, ask a librarian.
We're happy to help!