6 QUICK TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR SEARCHING

(a+b)^2 = a^2 + b^2 + 2ab
If your original search didn’t retrieve enough material, try coming up with related terms or synonyms for your keywords and linking them with OR.

The Boolean operator OR is also a helpful tool when a search needs to be as comprehensive as possible.
In the left example, a search for the single term “cops” retrieves just over 1,000 articles.

At the right, the Boolean operator OR links the related terms police with cops and increases our search results dramatically.
Add concepts with AND

(Cops OR Police) AND misconduct

If you need to narrow and focus your results, add new keywords to your topic and link them with AND.

The Boolean operator AND is a helpful tool when you want to combine several different concepts.
Boolean Operator AND

(Cops OR Police)

The example on the left illustrates our broad search with the related terms cops or police.

(Cops OR Police) AND misconduct

In the example on the right, we’ve used the Boolean operator AND to narrow our search to focus on police misconduct.
Truncation Searching

Psychology

Psychology → Psychological → Psychological

Psychologist

Psychologist

You can also make your searches more effective by looking for multiple forms of a word.

This will increase your number of results. You can look for multiple word endings by doing truncation searching.

First, look for the common root word.

Add an asterisk to the end of the common root. This will tell the database to return results that use that common root word and any variety of endings.
Truncation Searching

Psychology

You can see that a search for psychology had 1.1 million results...

Psycholog*

...while a truncation search added over 200 thousand more results
“Climate change”

Another way to make your searches more effective is to use quotation marks for phrases.

The quotation marks tell the database to look for an exact set of words, in that exact order.

Climate AND change

Without quotation marks, the database looks for the words, but not necessarily used together.
Phrase Searching

Without quotation marks:

Searching for climate change without quotes had over 126 thousand results.

With quotation marks:

Using quotation marks to search for a phrase reduced the number of results by nearly two thousand.
Don’t limit to full text

Some databases offer a “limit to full text” option. If you place this limit, you may inadvertently eliminate useful items from your results.
Don’t limit to full text

All results:

Limited to full text:

In this example, limiting to full text cut over half of the possible results.
Want full text? Look for these links:

- Full text available
- PDF Full Text
- Full text
- Online access
- HTML Full Text
- Full text - PDF
- Check for full text
- Check for full-text
- Find a copy
Different disciplines will approach the same topic from their individual viewpoints. Searching multiple relevant databases will enrich your trove of results.
You can access our full list of databases from the Databases A-Z list on the library website.
ASK A LIBRARIAN

library.northeastern.edu/ask