

# Search Techniques and Research Guide

## Search Techniques

Using AND, OR and parentheses

Use "and" to join two different key words when you need both of them.

For example, the search:

Find:

Would only give books or articles that have both "symptoms" and "depression" in them.

On the other hand, use of the word "or" to join key words allows the computer to find either word, but not necessarily both. "Or" usually joins synonyms or words that mean about the same thing, at least to your search. For example,

Find:

Would give results that have either "depression" or "anxiety", or possibly both.

You can combine any number of terms using "and" and "or", but if you use both, you need to remember to use parentheses to separate your concepts, like this:

Find:

Because "depression" and "anxiety" are interchangeable, we join them with "or". We don't need both of those words in the article, just one or the other. "Symptoms" has to be there, though, so we join it with "and".

## Truncation and quotation marks

Another good technique is called "truncation".

If you want to search for a key word like "teenage", it's a good idea to think up similar words so that you get as many results as possible, at least at first. For example, the article might use "teens", "teen", "teenager" or "teenagers". One option would be to use "or", like in the previous examples.

Find:

But a more efficient way would be to "truncate", by cutting off the word at a key point and adding a special character (this character is usually an asterisk \*, but might also be a dollar sign \$ ). We would truncate "teenage" by entering "teen\*" in the find field, like this:

Find:

This tells the search engine to look for any words that start with "t-e-e-n".

Be careful! Remember to use as many letters as possible. If we were to truncate "teenager" as "tee\*" we would get articles relating to golf, tee shirts and all other definitions of the word.

(...continued)

### Quotation marks

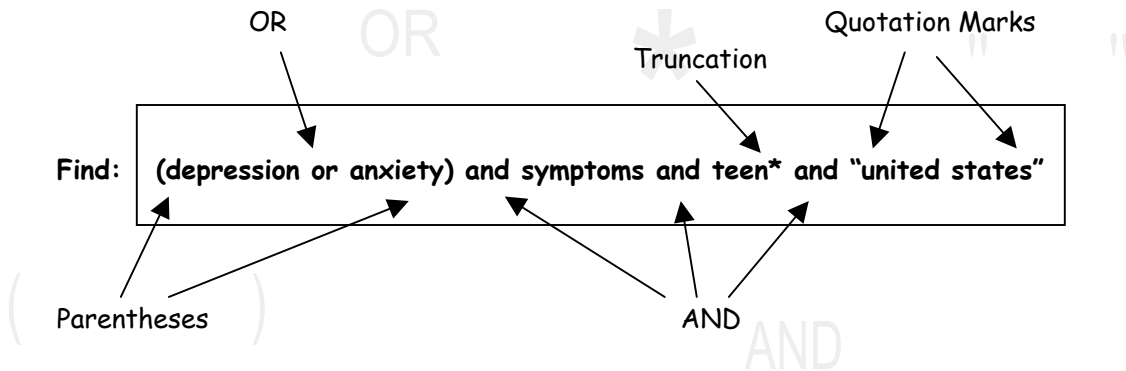
One other technique is to use quotation marks. Putting two or more words in quotes tells the search engine that those words must be adjacent and in that order. Adjacent means that there are no words in between. For example,

Find: "United States"

You'll need to be careful with this one, too. Putting quotes around terms that don't need them will give you too few results, and you may not get some articles that would be good to use. Only use quotes when there are two words that **MUST** be together to be right. "United States", "Registered Nurse" or "Kent State University" would be good ways to use quotes. Topics like *computer software* or *music theory* should NOT be put in quotes. In the first case, a relevant article might discuss software for computers, or even just software; assuming that we know it's for a computer. *Music theory* might be called musical theory in one article, or theory of music in another, so we would not use quotes around either of those examples.

### Summary

The techniques we've covered here include AND, OR, parentheses, truncation and quotation marks. You can use these techniques by themselves or in any combination; even use all of them in a single search. For example, if we wanted to find articles on the topic of symptoms of teenage depression in the United States, we might try the following search strategy...



All of the articles we get from this search will contain both of the words "symptoms" and "United States", as well as at least one word beginning with "teen" and then either "depression" or "anxiety". If any of these criteria are missing, that article won't show up in our results.

Creating a good search strategy can take some flexibility and creative thinking. If you're having trouble or have any questions on how to find good resources, please ask a reference librarian.

**Bromfield Library**  
Reference Desk help is available:  
**M-Th: 8AM - 8PM; F: 8AM - 5PM**

Call us at : (419) 755-4326  
Or email us: <http://library.mansfield.ohio-state.edu/email-ref.html>