

Transcript: Boolean Operators

Boolean operators are the small but mighty words AND, OR, and NOT that establish the relationships among your search terms when you are searching a database or a catalogue. You can use Boolean operators to narrow or expand your search. These terms save you time by focusing your searches for best results. Let's explore how Boolean operators work.

We usually use the word AND when we want to add components. For example, when we order a sandwich, we ask for cheese AND lettuce AND tomatoes AND mayonnaise. This means, the more ANDs, the more there is on our sandwich! Using AND in a database search, however, has the opposite effect. When you search for something that has one subject AND another, you are linking concepts but narrowing your search results. This narrowing happens because you are asking for results that include both subjects, not just one or the other. Therefore, when you use the word AND, you will end up with fewer results.

A search in UNB WorldCat using the keywords phones AND sleep returns over a 1,000 results. A search using an additional keyword--phones AND television AND sleep--returns only around 200 results. These results are significantly different because they contain not only the first two keywords--phones and sleep--but also the third keyword television.

When you use OR in a search, it expands your results because the search includes one subject OR another OR both. A search using the keywords phones OR television AND sleep returns over 5,000 results. There are many results, since they contain either the keywords phones and sleep OR television and sleep OR phones, television, and sleep.

Use NOT to exclude terms from your search. When using NOT, always locate it at the end of your search.

If we search phones OR television AND sleep NOT adults, we exclude anything that notes adults as a keyword. This reduces the results of the search by almost a 1000 items.

You may notice that many databases already have Boolean operators built into the search screen to help you establish the relationship among your search terms.

Happy Searching ... perhaps you might want to grab a snack first! I know I need a sandwich.

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