

Better searching using AND, OR, NOT

In this video we'll give some tips on better searching using AND, OR, and NOT.

The technical term for these words used in searching is Boolean operators. You can use them to combine keywords in your search to get quite different search results. Here's how they work.

Let's say you are researching the effects of coffee, especially espresso, on the study habits of university students.

If you search the library catalogue for coffee OR espresso, your results will include all materials that include at least one of these terms. This means all your results will contain either the term coffee or the term espresso, but not necessarily both together.

If you use AND, your search will only find items that contain both terms, coffee and espresso. Since both terms need to be in every item, this means you will get many fewer results than using OR.

If you use NOT, as in coffee NOT espresso, your search will retrieve items that contain the term coffee, but will exclude any items that include the term espresso.

You can also combine multiple operators in your search. For example, you might want to search for something with more than 2 search terms, like coffee, students, and espresso. You can combine the operators differently between the different terms to get different results.

If I search for coffee and students and espresso, I get a small number of results that contain all 3 search terms together. If you search for coffee or espresso and students, you get results that have the term students and also have either the term coffee or the term espresso.

Most databases let you combine multiple operators in one search. I'll show you how it works in Proquest. Here, I'll enter coffee or espresso in the first box, to indicate I want anything that mentions either coffee or espresso. Then, I'll choose NOT from the drop-down menu beside the next row of search boxes. Finally, I'll type beans in the search box beside the NOT, to exclude anything that has the term beans. Each of the search results will contain either the term coffee or the term espresso; none of them should contain the term beans.

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.