

***EBSCO Searching Tips***  
**User Guide**

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## **About this User Guide**

Searching tools help you adjust the focus of a search when using EBSCO research databases and interfaces. This user guide explains how to use Boolean operators, Field Codes, Wildcards, and Truncation. Also covered is how to use proximity searches, including phrases in searches, and single vs. plural searching.

## Booleans

*Boolean logic* defines logical relationships between terms in a search. The *Boolean search operators* are **and**, **or** and **not**. You can use these operators to create a very broad or very narrow search.

- *And* combines search terms so that each search result contains all of the terms. For example, **travel and Europe** finds articles that contain *both* travel and Europe.
- *Or* combines search terms so that each search result contains at least one of the terms. For example, **college or university** finds results that contain *either* college or university.
- *Not* excludes terms so that each search result does not contain any of the terms that follow it. For example, **television not cable** finds results that contain television but *not* cable.

The following table illustrates the operation of Boolean terms:

And	Or	Not
Each result contains <b>all</b> search terms.	Each result contains <b>at least one</b> search term.	Results <b>do not contain</b> the specified terms.
The search <i>heart and lung</i> finds items that contain <b>both</b> <i>heart</i> and <i>lung</i> .	The search <i>heart or lung</i> finds items that contain <b>either</b> <i>heart</i> or items that contain <i>lung</i> .	The search <i>heart not lung</i> finds items that contain <i>heart</i> <b>but do not contain</b> <i>lung</i> .

## Using Booleans and Parentheses

To make even better use of Boolean operators, you can use *parentheses* to nest query terms within other query terms.

You can enclose search terms and their operators in parentheses to specify the *order in which they are interpreted*. Information *within* parentheses is read *first*, then information *outside* parentheses is read *next*. For example,

When you enter **(mouse OR rat) AND trap**, the search engine retrieves results containing the word mouse or the word rat together with the word trap in the fields searched by default.

If there are nested parentheses, the search engine processes the *innermost* parenthetical expression first, then the next, and so on until the entire query has been interpreted. For example,

**((mouse OR rat) AND trap) OR mousetrap**

## Using Booleans When Phrase Searching

When Boolean operators are contained within a phrase that is enclosed in quotation marks, the operator is treated as a stop word. When this is the case, any single word will be searched for in its place.

## Field Codes

You can use *field codes* to create a search using indexed fields referenced in either the citation or full display (or full text, if available). EBSCO uses two-character abbreviations for field codes such as SU-Subject, AU-Author, TI- Article\_Title, DB-Date of Birth, or DD-Date of Death.

Field codes are database specific. For more information on which searchable fields are available for a database, on the Choose Database Screen, click the **More Information** link for the database. From the Search Screen, click the **Help** icon to the right of Database drop-down list or Database Name. The Database Help Screen displays. Click the **Searchable Fields** link. All the field codes are listed with detailed explanations of what they mean.

### To create a search using a field code:

1. At the Search Screen, type one of the two-letter codes before your search terms in the **Find** field. For example, to search for articles that include the subject sports injuries and the term hockey, type: *SU Sports Injuries and Hockey*.
2. Click **Search**. The Result List appears.

**Note:** If you enter a word that is used as a field code, (for example, AN) *LIRC* assumes you want to search using the field code rather than the word. In this case, you should place quotation marks around your search terms.

## Proximity Searches

You can use a *proximity search* to search for two or more words that occur within a specified number of words (or fewer) of each other in the databases. Proximity searching is used with a Keyword or Boolean search.

The proximity operators are composed of a letter (**N** or **W**) and a **number** (to specify the number of words). The proximity operator is placed between the words that are to be searched, as follows:

**Near Operator (N)** - **N5** finds the words if they are within *five words* of one another regardless of the order in which they appear.

For example, type **tax N5 reform** to find results that would match *tax reform* as well as *reform of income tax*.

**Within Operator (W)** - In the following example, **W8** finds the words if they are within *eight words* of one another and in the order in which you entered them.

For example, type **tax W8 reform** to find results that would match *tax reform* but would **not** match *reform of income tax*.

**Note:** These operators will not work when parentheses are used to separate search terms. For example: **(tax or tariff) N5 reform** will not find results. You must use **(tax N5 reform)** or **(tariff N5 reform)**.

## Improving Search Results

When searching EBSCO databases, if you receive a message that indicates no results were found, you may want to refine your search terms and try running the search again.

There are different ways to refine your search so that the maximum search results are returned. In addition to trying the suggestions provided on the Search Screens, you could also try any of the following:

- Depending on the databases selected and how your library administrator has configured the interface, you may have expanders available. If so, try broadening your search to locate terms not only in the citation and abstract but also within the full text of the article. By marking the "Also search within full text of the article," you will expand the search.
- Depending on the databases selected and how your library administrator has configured the interface, you may have a thesaurus expander available. If so, try marking the "Also search for related words" expander. EBSCO's thesaurus will find synonyms, alternate spellings and plurals for your search terms.
- Try unmarking one or more limiters. Limiters narrow your result list—depending upon the limiters you've chosen, you may have created too narrow of a search.
- The Search Screens let you create a Boolean search with operators such as **AND**, **OR** and **NOT**. These searches are not designed to yield significant results if you enter long phrases or questions in everyday English.

If you receive a message that indicates an error in your query syntax, try searching again, keeping in mind the following:

- Reenter your search terms. Make sure you don't unnecessarily repeat words.
- Don't duplicate Boolean terms. (Enter "heart and lung" not "heart and and lung.")

There may be situations where you rerun a search and no results are found.

- If you run a search against a different database, the limiters and expanders you originally selected may not appear in the new database.
- If you run a search against the same database, but the database has changed, the limiters and expanders you originally selected may no longer be available in that database.

## Including Phrases in a Search

When your search string includes phrases, the default search order is that phrases are searched in the order in which they are typed in and with the words right next to each other. It is recommended that phrases be enclosed in quotation marks when included in searches.

## Using Stop Words

EBSCO treats certain words as "stop words"—for example, **been**, **however**, or **so**. Stop words are always ignored, even if they are enclosed in quotation marks.

Stop words are commonly used words such as articles, pronouns and prepositions. Stop words are not added to the search dictionary, since their relevance is minimal, but they are counted as words for proximity (the distance between words). Ignoring stop words allows the search engine to retrieve a more precise Result List, especially for a natural language (relevancy ranked) search.

The search engine ignores stop words (such as the, for, of and after), finding any *single* word in its place. For example, if you entered *company of America*, the search engine would find *company of America*, *company in America*, or *company for America*. It would not find *company of the America*, because the search engine retains a word distance.

The stop word *or* will be replaced with any word. For example if you searched for *sink "or" swim*, the results could include *sink don't swim*.

If you enter two stop words, the search engine will find any two words in the place of the stop words. For example, if you searched for *company of the America*, the search engine finds any two words in the place of the stop words.

EBSCO has a primary list of stop words. Additionally, several databases have their own list of stop words. All of these lists were created based upon The Library of Congress' suggestions on stop words, as well as our own statistical analysis.

## Using Quotation Marks

Typically, when a phrase is enclosed by double quotations marks, the exact phrase is searched. This is not true of phrases containing stop words. A stop word will never be searched for in an EBSCO database, even if it is enclosed in double quotation marks. A search query with stop words only (i.e. no other terms) yields no results.

When Boolean operators are included in a phrase search that is enclosed by quotations marks, the operator is treated as a stop word. When this is the case, any single word will be searched in its place.

If one of the words in your search term is also a searchable field code, that word will be treated as a searchable field code unless your phrase is surrounded by quotation marks.

If the "Automatically And Search Terms" expander is set to "On" during your search, your words will be searched individually, as if the word "and" were included between each word in your search. However, if "Automatically And Search Terms" is set to "On" and your phrase is enclosed in quotation marks, your keywords will still be searched as a phrase.

## Using Punctuation

If you enter phrases with punctuation, the search engine searches for the term both with and without the punctuation. For example, if you enter *television: talk show*, the search engine finds results with *television talk-show*, *television talk show*, and if synonyms have been activated, *TV talk show*.

If you enter hyphenated words in a search, the search engine automatically searches for the word in both hyphenated and non-hyphenated forms. For example, entering *coca-cola* will find both *Coca Cola* and *Coca-Cola*.

If you are searching for a title that ends in a question mark, the symbol should be removed from the search in order to ensure results will be returned. The question mark symbol is treated as a wildcard when searching the EBSCOhost databases.

## Single vs. Plural Searching

In order to provide the most comprehensive search results, when *Legal Information Reference Center* conducts a search, it may return results that include both the single and plural versions of your search terms.

### Searching for Singular, Plural, and Possessive Words

When a *singular* word is searched, the plural and possessive forms of that word will also be searched. However, if the word is enclosed in quotation marks, plural and possessive forms will not be searched.

For example, a search for the phrase *alley cat* without quotation marks could also search for all of the following:

alley cat, alley cat's, alley cats, alley's cat, alley's cat's, alley's cats, alleys cat, alleys cat's, alleys cats

However, when a *plural* is searched, the search engine will automatically automatically search for the singular version of the term. If the plural is spelled differently, (e.g. child, children), a search is not expanded unless the "Apply additional terms to query" expander is checked. *Legal Information Reference Center* may also return results with regional spellings (e.g., color, colour), acronyms (e.g., TV, T.V.) as well as a limited number of synonyms.

## Wildcard and Truncation

Use the wildcard and truncation symbols to create searches where there are unknown characters, multiple spellings or various endings. Neither the wildcard nor the truncation symbol can be used as the first character in a search term.

### Wildcards

The **wildcard** is represented by a question mark **?** or a pound sign **#**.

To use the **?** wildcard, enter your search terms and replace each unknown character with a **?**. *Legal Information Reference Center* finds all citations of that word with the **?** replaced by a letter.

For example, type **ne?t** to find all citations containing **neat**, **nest** or **next**. *Legal Information Reference Center* does not find **net** because the wildcard replaces a single character.

**Note:** When searching for a title that ends in a question mark, the symbol should be removed from the search in order to ensure results will be returned.

To use the **#** wildcard, enter your search terms, adding the **#** in places where an alternate spelling may contain an extra character. *Legal Information Reference Center* finds all citations of the word that appear with or without the extra character.

For example, type **colo#r** to find all citations containing **color** or **colour**.

**Note:** Searching the U.S. spelling of words will also include some spelling variations (i.e. colour or odour) but not all spelling variations.

### Truncation

**Truncation** is represented by an asterisk (**\***). To use truncation, enter the root of a search term and replace the ending with an **\***. *Legal Information Reference Center* finds all forms of that word.

For example, type **comput\*** to find the words **computer** or **computing**.

**Note:** The Truncation symbol (**\***) may also be used between words to match any word.

For example, **a midsummer \* dream** will return results that contain the exact phrase, **a midsummer night's dream**.

## Stop Words

*Stop words* vary by database. A sample list of common stop words appears below.

a  
an  
are  
as  
at  
be  
because  
been  
but  
by  
for  
however  
if  
in  
is  
of  
on  
p  
so  
the  
there  
to  
was  
were  
whatever  
whether  
would