Searching Online Databases: A Brief Tutorial

Searching an online database utilizes methods that differ from that of a basic online search:

- Controlled vocabulary
  - Indexed terms or Keywords
- Subject Headings
- Boolean Operators
- Truncation (Wildcards)
- Limiters
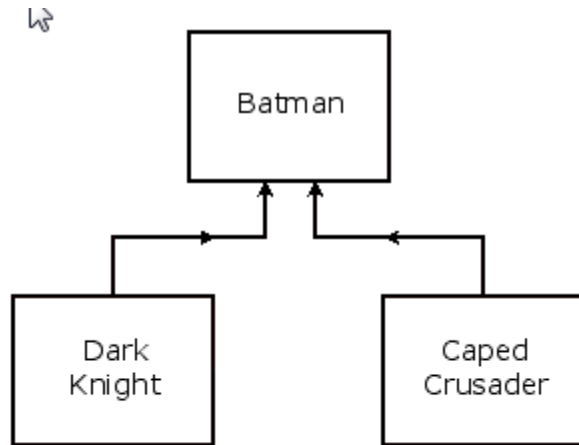- Information Currency

Controlled Vocabulary

- **Controlled Vocabulary** makes database searching more efficient by utilizing academically accepted terms to describe key concepts. It is different than the use of **Natural Language**, which is how typical search engines, such as Google, are indexed.
- **Natural Language** can also be thought of as "*everyday language*".
- Stop Words are ignored in **Controlled Vocabulary**. **Stop Words** are words, such as 'the', 'a', 'an', 'this', and 'that'.
- **Controlled Vocabulary** can also be thought of as *indexed terms* or *keywords*.
- **Controlled Vocabulary** is used in organizing **Subject Headings** for online database records and online catalogs (OPAC – *online public access catalog*) in your local public or academic library.

Controlled Vocabulary

Controlled Vocabulary, within the world of the library, is a carefully selected list of words and phrases that are used to tag documents, books, or other work, making the retrieval of information easier.

Batman

Dark Knight

Caped Crusader

Or in the language of a controlled vocabulary, like this:

Batman
USE FOR: Dark Knight, Caped Crusader

Caped Crusader
USE Batman

Dark Knight
USE Batman

Controlled Vocabulary utilizes relationships to connect key terms. For instance a search for "Batman" might also retrieve results for "Caped Crusader" or "Dark Knight".

Controlled Vocabulary

Some useful tips:

The following tips and techniques may improve your search experience:

- Use **Boolean Logic** (AND, OR) to combine terms that describe your topic.
- Carefully examine descriptors or *subject headings* to use in your next search.
- **DO NOT** use phrases, such as "the Dark Knight in children's media". Instead combine terms to represent individual concepts: "Dark Knight AND children AND media".
- If too many sources are produced, add more terms to **NARROW** your search: "Dark Knight AND children AND media AND effects".
- If you don't find enough sources, use fewer terms to **BROADEN** your search: Dark Knight AND media".

The term **batman** would appear here had there been an exact match

BATMAN & Robin films **Use** BATMAN films

☐ BATMAN (Fictitious character)

☐ BATMAN (Fictitious character) in mass media

☐ BATMAN films

Here, a Subject Term search for "Batman" provides other options.

Subject Headings

Why are they important?

- Knowing how terms are organized within a database makes searching for information much easier.
- Knowing what the accepted **Subject Headings** are for a given topic will also help you search the *online catalog* (OPAC – *Online* Pubic Access *Catalog*) of any library. (http://bcc-books.barstow.edu/vwebv/searchBasic?sk=en_US)
- The Library of Congress website offers extensive information and an Authority Headings Search regarding approved **Subject Headings** (http://authorities.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First)

Subject Headings

Information within databases (as well as Library Online Catalogs) are organized by Subject Headings. For example, EBSCOhost features a **Subject Terms** tab located at the top of the page.

Many databases feature an index of Subject Terms. Utilizing this feature greatly enhances your search experience and produces focused results that might be better attuned to your research needs.

Subject Headings

Subject Headings play a key role in the organization of a library's online catalog.

The Union Soldier in Battle Enduring the Ordeal of Combat /

Title:	The Union Soldier in Battle Enduring the Ordeal of Combat / Earl J. Hess.
Author:	Hess, Earl J.
Publisher:	Lawrence : University Press of Kansas, c1997.
ISBN:	0700608370 (alk. paper)
Description:	xii, 244 p. : ill. ; 24 cm.
Format:	Book
Series:	Modern war studies
Subjects:	United States. Army--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
	United States. Army--Military life--History.
	Combat--Psychological aspects--History--19th century.
	Soldiers--United States--Psychology--History--19th century.
	United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Psychological aspects.
Notes:	Includes bibliographical references (p. 223-237) and index.
Held at:	Barstow Community College

An example of a Subject Heading can be found in our own OPAC system.

Understanding how one resource is indexed may help you utilize others.

Subject Headings

- **Subject Headings** are comprised of a key term, such as "United States. Army", and are occasionally followed by more precise *subject subdivisions* (sometimes indicted by dashes). In the previous slide the ***subdivision*** for the first **Subject Heading** is "**History**", followed by "**Civil War, 1861-1865**".
- Many subscription-based databases will index **Subject Headings** that have been used to catalog their material.
- Utilizing search methods, such as *Truncation* or *Limiters*, may also reveal relevant terms to use for database searches.
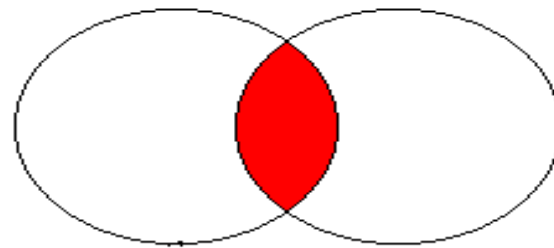
Boolean Logic!

- **Boolean Logic** takes its name from a British mathematician named **George Boole** (1815 – 1864)
- Brief Definition: **Boolean Operators** are effective search tools and define the relationships between words or groups of words, narrowing or expanding search results.
- Uses *"AND"*, *"OR"*, *"NOT"*, and *"()"* to define search strings.
- Key usages: "**AND**" narrows a search to contain **all** words. For instance, a search for "children **AND** school" is telling the database that results MUST contain both "children" and "school" in the results.
- Using "**OR**" broadens a search to retrieve any of the words in a search query.
- "**NOT**" narrows the search phrase to retrieve records that *do not* contain the term that follows.
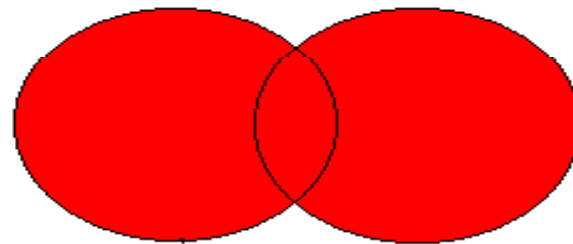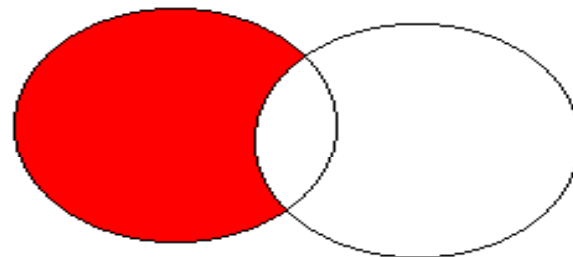
Boolean Logic!

Truncation (Wildcards)

Truncation is a useful search tool that allows you to search for *variations* of a search term or word. For example, in **EBSCOhost**, the truncation symbol is "*" (asterisk). A search for "child*" will yield all variations of that word: Child, Children, Childhood, etc...

- *Note: Different databases utilize varying truncation symbols or format search tools differently. Refer to a database's "Help" index for advanced search parameters.*

EBSCO HOST

Searching: **Academic Search Elite,**   Show all | Choose Databases

child*   **Search**   **Clear**   ?

Basic Search | Advanced Search | Visual Search | ▶ Search History

1. **Academic Journal**

   FATHERS' PARENTING AND **CHILDREN'S** ADJUSTMENT: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF FATHER-CHILD CONFLICT.

   By: Xiayun Yin; Zhihua Li; Linyan Su. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal.* 2012, Vol. 40 Issue 8, p1401-1408. 8p.

   In this study we explored the degree to which father-child conflict mediated the relationship between father parenting and **child** adjustment in a sample of 338 Chinese **children**. It was found that ...
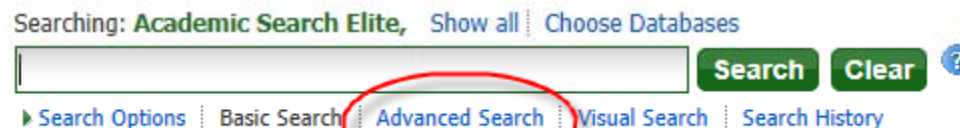
Advanced Features!

Many databases, such as **EBSCOhost**, offer "**Advanced Search**" options. Selecting this feature will allow you to:
- Build a **Boolean** search strategy
- Restrict your search to *peer-reviewed* material, or
- specify document types.

Selections such as these are called *Search Limiters* and allow you to more effectively search for a target query.

In addition, web-based search engines, such as **Google** or **Yahoo**, also feature advanced search options, albeit not as exhaustive as their academic counterparts.

Searching: **Academic Search Elite,** Show all | Choose Databases

[ ] **Search** **Clear**

▶ Search Options | Basic Search | Advanced Search | Visual Search | Search History

Advanced Features!

Search Options

Search modes ?
- ● Boolean/Phrase
- ○ Find all my search terms
- ○ Find any of my search terms
- ○ SmartText Searching Hint

Limit your results

➤ Full Text ☑

➤ Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals ☐

Image Quick View ☐

Advanced Search Options will allow you to narrow your search results to specific types of documents and publications. You may also indicate whether or not you would like your results feature images, maps, graphs, etc...

Information Currency

Some important things to consider when researching information:

Once you find the information you have been searching for, it is important to consider the *credibility* of a source. The following guidelines can be used when considering online content, as well as in-print (book), web sites, and periodical articles for college research:

1. **Authority** – Can you locate the author's name on the credited document? Can you identify the author's credentials? Does the URL provide clues as to the authoring agency?
2. **Bias** – Can you decipher any political, philosophical, or religious leanings from the information provided? Are different perspectives offered?
3. **Scope** – Is there enough information provided about the topic? Who is the target audience…elementary, average, or academic reading?
4. **Purpose** – Is the article or source presented objectively or is it opinion? Is the source reporting facts or the point of view of the author?
5. **Currency** – When was the source published? Is the information still of relevance? When was the source last updated?

Thank you for viewing this presentation. Should you have any questions regarding has been covered here please contact the library at:

Phone: **760-252-2411 x7342**

or our Librarian, Kyri Freeman

email: **kfreeman@barstow.edu**