DATABASES

WHAT IS A DATABASE?

A database is a collection of data organized so that the data may be searched. You can get much better search results by incorporating a database's underlying structure into your search plan.

A database is made of files; files are made of records, records are made of fields, and fields are made of words or numbers: words → fields → records → files → database. The library's databases contain articles (from newspapers, magazines, and journals), and these articles are all organized into records.

FIELDS

A field is a type of data. Fields are determined before a database is even made; that is, you have to know what you are organizing before you organize it. Fields commonly found in library databases include Author, Title, Cited Reference, Article Number, Subject/Descriptor, Source/Journal name, and Article type/Publication type/Document type.

Knowing and searching fields is the #1 way to search better because this technique produces very exact results. Search by field whenever you can! Most databases call field searching "Advanced Search" even though it is nothing fancy. We will not cover every field in every database, because fields are usually further defined in databases' Help files. Fields help you search smarter, faster, and better.

A DATABASE'S "INDEX"

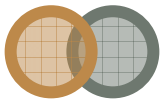
Databases do not wait until you're using them to search through their articles. When articles are cataloged in a database their information is added to an index; this index contains words and the article number for each article that contains that word. For example, an entry in a database index might say:

Cancer 5, 6, 7, 15, 22, 23, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 52, 51, 79, 105, 202, 240, 241, ...
Smoking 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 29, 31, 37, 41, 43, 47, 53, 59, 61, 67, 71, 73, 79, ...

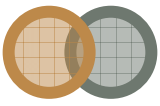
When you search for "cancer" you get articles 5, 6, 7, 15, 22, 23, 40, etc. When you search for "smoking" you get articles 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, etc. When you search for "cancer AND smoking" you get only articles 5, 7, 23, 41, 43, and 79. The search for "cancer OR smoking" finds them all.

BOOLEAN LOGIC

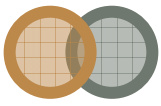
- Terms connected by AND are required in all results; therefore AND always narrows a search and produces fewer results. AND restricts.
- Terms connected by OR are preferred but not required as long as a record has at least one of the terms. Smart searchers use OR to connect synonyms. OR expands.
- Terms connected by NOT are excluded, that is, the second term is not allowed in any result; therefore NOT always produces fewer results. NOT always narrows a search, but it usually narrows it too much by throwing out articles that could really be useful. Word to the wise: limit your use of NOT!



AND



OR



NOT

RF 9/06

DATABASES

THE KEYWORD MENU APPROACH

Template

Concept 1		*Concept 2*		*Concept 3*	
	AND		AND		*Use 'OR' between synonyms*

<---------- *Use 'AND' between terms* ---------->

Example 1

Concept 1		*Concept 2*		*Concept 3*	
race racial ethnic ethnicity	AND	poverty income class socioeconomic	AND	academic achievement school success educational attainment	*Use 'OR' between synonyms*

Use 'AND' between terms

Example 2

Concept 1		*Concept 2*		*Concept 3*	
gay* lesbian* homosex*	AND	parent* mother* father*	AND		*Use 'OR' between synonyms*

Use 'AND' between terms

COMBINE FIELD SEARCHING WITH BOOLEAN LOGIC

Combining field searching with Boolean logic is just about the smartest thing you can do. For example, you could perform the searches outlined above in Example 1 & Example 2 in a database's Title or Abstract fields. Or you could perform a search in the Subject field AND the keyword field.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT DATABASE

In general, when researching an academic topic, choose a scholarly database to identify scholarly articles first and then use the full-text databases second to retrieve the articles you've identified. Use the right tool for the right task. Find descriptions of the databases online or ask for help.

FIVE STEPS TO SMARTER SEARCHING

1.) do field searching, especially subject searching, whenever you can; 2.) you still must do keyword searching in order to find everything because subject searching isn't perfect -- use the Keyword Menu approach above; 3.) track down any relevant references cited in your articles; 4.) if you find a good author see what else she has written; 5.) ask for help, ask for help, ask for help.

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Current Sociology
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International Criminal Justice Review
International Journal of Comparative Sociology
International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology
International Social Work
International Sociology
Journal of Classical Sociology
Journal of Social Work
Journal of Sociology
The Prison Journal
Probation Journal
Punishment & Society
Qualitative Inquiry
Qualitative Research
Qualitative Social Work
Race & Class
Sociological Methods & Research
Sociology
Theoretical Criminology
Theory, Culture & Society
Violence Against Women
Work and Occupations
Youth & Society
Youth Justice
Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice

DEMONSTRATION SEARCHES

	Total	**Good**	**Bad**
1. Just a simple search	_____	_____	_____
2. Synonyms	_____	_____	_____
3. In the Abstract	_____	_____	_____
4. In the Title	_____	_____	_____
5. Synonyms AND Truncation	_____	_____	_____
6. Search #5 in the Title	_____	_____	_____

KEYWORD MENU APPROACH

Research Question: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Concept #1	Concept #2	Concept #3
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____