

Refining keyword searches in databases and search engines

Although command terms and characters vary among electronic databases and Web search engines, some of the most commonly used functions are listed here.

- Use quotation marks around words that are part of a phrase: “Broadway musicals.”
- Use AND to connect words that must appear in a document: Ireland AND peace. Some search engines require a plus sign instead: Ireland +peace.
- Use NOT in front of words that must not appear in a document: Titanic NOT movie. Some search engines require a minus sign (hyphen) instead: Titanic -movie.
- Use OR if only one of the terms must appear in a document: “mountain lion” OR cougar.
- Use an asterisk as a substitute for letters that might vary: “marine biolog*” (to find *marine biology* or *marine biologist*, for example).
- Use parentheses to group a search expression and combine it with another: (cigarettes OR tobacco OR smok*) AND lawsuits.