



Connecting and Combining Search Terms

1. Define your topic and identify the main concepts involved

eg the impact of stress on studying

Concept 1 stress

Concept 2 studying

2. Make a list of keywords for each concept – remember to include similar words or alternative spellings, scientific vs popular language

Concept 1 stress, anxiety, worry

Concept 2 studying, studies, learning

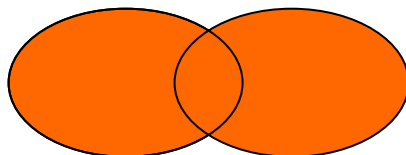
3. Think about how you can combine these keywords in your search using OR, AND or NOT

Searching using a string of search terms (eg typing in a sentence) is not an effective search strategy. You must think about how your keywords relate to one another, and use OR, AND or NOT as appropriate.

OR, AND and NOT are often described in searching jargon as **Boolean** or **Logical Operators** or **Connectors**.

When you combine keywords using **OR** your search will find items containing **either** one or both of your keywords. This is often illustrated using diagrams like the one below:

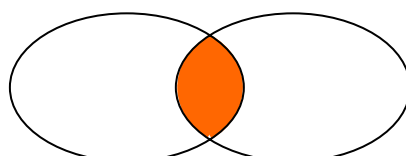
stress OR *anxiety*



So use **OR** to make your search broader, and to combine words with similar meanings.

When you combine keywords using **AND** your search will only find items containing **both** of your keywords:

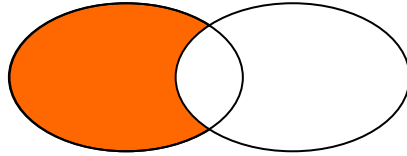
stress AND *studying*



So use **AND** to make your search more specific, and to combine different concepts.

When you combine keywords using **NOT** your search will find items containing one of your keywords **but not the other**. For example if you were looking for information on *adult students* rather than *children* you could exclude *children* from your search result.

students NOT children



Be cautious about using **NOT** as you may exclude potentially useful items.

4. Basic commands that most databases allow

- **Combining search terms using OR, AND or NOT**

On some databases you need to select the connector you want from a drop down box. Other databases allow you to type these connectors in full as part of your search eg

stress OR anxiety OR worry AND studying

Be careful when mixing connectors in the one search using either drop down boxes or typing the search, as you may not get the results you want unless the database processes the OR connector before the AND connector.

So it is best to conduct AND searches and OR searches separately, then combine the search results. However, some databases allow you to use parentheses (brackets) to indicate which combinations should be processed first eg

(stress OR anxiety OR worry) AND studying

- **Searching for different forms of a word**

Most databases allow you to use a special character, described in searching jargon as a **Truncation Symbol**, to search for all words beginning with a particular base eg

typing *learn** would find *learn, learns, learner, learners, learning* etc

Some databases allow you to use another special character, usually called a **Wildcard**, to search for alternative spellings eg

typing *organi?ation* would find both *organisation* and *organization*

Although a Truncation Symbol can usually be used to represent any number of characters, a single Wildcard usually represents one character only.

Note that the characters used to represent Truncation and Wildcards varies from one database to another – you may need to use a question mark (?), an asterisk (*), a dollar (\$) or some other symbol to denote truncation or use of a wildcard. The online help in each database will indicate the correct character to use.