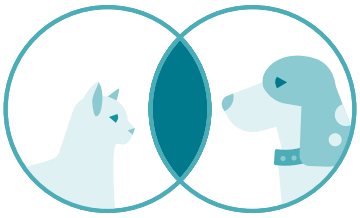
Top 5 Searching Strategies

EBSCO research interfaces offer several options for creating targeted searches. Although powerful filters allow users to refine searches from the results page, these strategies can be used at the outset.

1. Boolean Operators

Boolean logic defines relationships between search terms. Boolean Search Operators — AND, OR and NOT — are used to create a very broad or very narrow search.

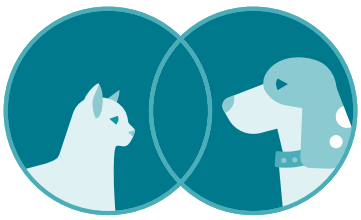
AND



Narrowing Boolean Operator

A search for *cats AND dogs* retrieves results that contain both search terms.

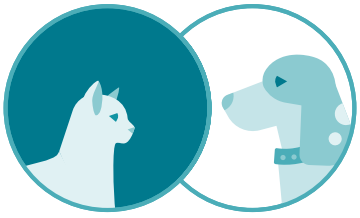
OR



Broadening Boolean Operator

A search for *cats OR dogs* retrieves all results that contain references to cats, all results that refer to dogs, and all results that include both search terms.

NOT



Negating Boolean Operator

A search for *cats NOT dogs* retrieves all results that refer to cats and none of the results that refer to dogs. Even if some of those articles about dogs also mention cats, they will not turn up in search results because using the NOT operator excludes them.

Combining Boolean Operators

You may wish to use more than one Boolean Operator in a search. To avoid getting unexpected results, it'simportant to know the order in which the operations are performed.

Never mix Boolean Operators without using parentheses. Grouping search terms within parentheses allows you to force the ordering of Boolean Operators. Without parentheses, a search of *cats OR kittens AND dogs OR puppies* would process *kittens AND dogs* first.

Here are examples of correctly formatted search strings: *(cats OR kittens OR felines) AND (dogs OR puppies OR canines); ("global warming" OR "climate change") AND ("alternative energy" OR "renewable energy")*

Tip: Use quotation marks when searching exact phrases, such as "climate change" or "Nobel Prize."

2. Truncation

Use an asterisk (*) when you want to search for results containing various forms of a word.

Example:

A search for *environment will find results containing *environment, environments, environmental* and *environmentalism.***

3. Wildcard

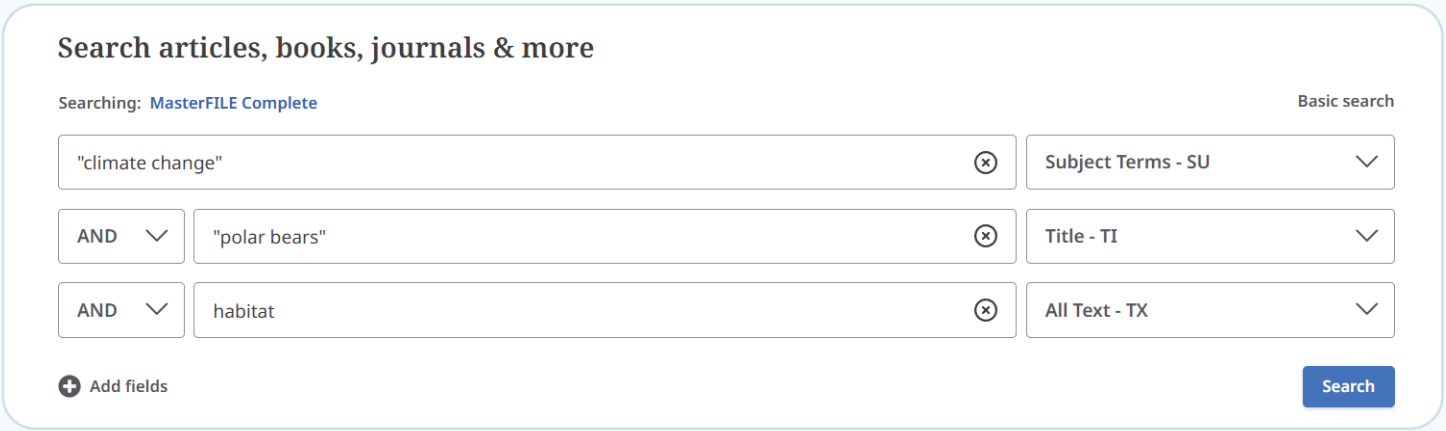
Use wildcards (? or #) in searches to account for alternate spellings. ? stands for one additional character, but not for zero characters. # stands for zero or one character.

Examples:

A search for *wom?n* will find results containing *woman* and *women.* A search of *colo#r* will find results containing *color* or *colour.*

4. Field Searching

Advanced Search (Guided Search) presents several rows of search boxes with pull-down menu selections that allow the user to tell the database which fields to search. These fields include Title, Abstract, Subject Terms and All Text. Users can also use Boolean Operators to combine keyword/field code entries.



5. Proximity Searching

Proximity Operators help the user achieve better relevance in search results, particularly when searching full-text books, long journal articles or newspaper articles. Near Operator (N) finds results in which search terms are within a specified number of words of one another in any order.

Example: *tax N5 reform* finds results that contain tax reform as well as reform of income tax.

Within Operator (W) finds results in which search terms are within a specified number of words of one another and in the order in which you entered them.

Example: *hiking W5 trails* finds results that contain hiking trails and hiking of easy trails, but does not find results containing easy trails for hiking.