

CHLS _____
Delgado and Rivera
2005

Assignment: Boolean Searches*

What Is a Boolean Search?

Named after 19th-century British mathematician George Boole, a *Boolean search* allows you to specify the logical relationships among keywords in your search. The basic elements of a Boolean search involve specifying whether keywords or phrases *can* appear in a search, *must* appear in a search, or *must not* appear in a search. By specifying these relationships, you are better able to locate information relevant to your topic.

The most commonly used Boolean search terms are **AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**. Please note that, while these are the terms most often used, many search engines use their own variants of these terms on advanced search forms. It's also important to remember that the specific commands for requiring or excluding keywords or phrases will vary depending on the electronic source you are searching. Your best bet is to review the online help on Boolean searches when you're searching a database, library catalog, or Web search site for the first time.

Boolean AND Searches: When you conduct a Boolean AND search, you tell the search engine to locate all records containing one keyword *and* another (that is, all records the search engine returns must contain both words, not just one of them). For example, if you search for all records containing the keywords *education* AND *reform*, you'll obtain a smaller, more focused number of results than you would by searching for just one keyword or the other.

Search For: *education* AND *reform*

Search Result: all records containing **both** keywords *education* **and** *reform*

Boolean OR Searches: When you conduct a Boolean OR search, you tell the search engine to locate all records containing one keyword or another (that is, all records the search engine returns must contain at least one of words but not necessarily both). For example, you could search for all records containing the keywords *publisher* OR *press*. This allows you to obtain a larger number of results than you would by searching for just one keyword or the other.

Search For: *publisher* OR *press*

Search Result: all records containing **either or both** of the keywords *publisher* **or** *press*

Boolean NOT Searches: When you conduct a Boolean NOT search, you tell the search engine to locate all records that do *not* contain a particular keyword. For example, you could search for all records containing the keywords *composition* but NOT *music*. Because the term *composition* is used in both writing and music instruction, if you're interested in looking only for sources that deal with written composition, you can use the Boolean term NOT to exclude sources dealing with musical composition.

Search for: *composition* NOT *music*

Result: all records containing the keyword *composition* **but not** containing the keyword *music*

Complex Searches: You can also use Boolean search terms in combination to construct complex searches. For example, you could search for all records containing the keywords *writing* or *composition* and the keyword *computers* but not the keyword *music*:

Search for: *writing* OR *composition* AND *computers* NOT *music*

Result: all records containing the keywords *writing* **or** *composition* **and** *computers*, **but not** containing the keyword *music*

THE ASSIGNMENT

DOING AN ONLINE SEARCH WITH BOOLEAN CONNECTING WORDS

Do a Boolean search on the following topics. Use at least two AND connectors in each one (such as “Anzaldúa AND Chicano AND Spanish”). Try several Boolean searches, experimenting with the use of OR and NOT. For each topic, indicate how many entries you located.

1. literature by Chicana writers
2. drug use among Olympic athletes
3. role of Chinese immigrants in building railroads in 19th century America
4. ethnic diversity in community colleges in California
5. power of health care lobbyists in Washington, D. C. to influence policy decisions

Write a paragraph about your experience in using Boolean search techniques. What were some of the difficulties you encountered? If you received “0” results, what did you do? If you received too many entries, how did you narrow your search? Did you seek any help? If so, from whom?

* RESOURCES:

Arkin, Marian and Cecilia Macheski. *Research Papers: A Practical Guide*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

Palmquist, Mike. *The Bedford Researcher*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001.