

BASIC SEARCH TIPS

Too Many Results? Narrow your search.

1. Add Additional Keywords.

In databases, **subject terms** can help you identify more narrow topics and keywords.

2. Choose More Narrow Search Terms.

Examples: • **Broader term:** law

• **Narrower term:** “environmental law” →

3. Use Limiters.

These are things like search fields (title or abstract) publication date, and format type.

4. Search For A Short Phrase With Quotation Marks.

Examples: • “environmental law”

• “environmental justice”

What Is A Subject Term?

Subject terms describe what a work is about. Every item in a database is assigned one or more subject terms. Subject terms can help you identify effective keywords. Most databases list subjects in their search results.

Too Few Results? Broaden Your Search

1. Choice Of Search Terms

Choosing the right search terms is key.

- Experiment with related terms.
- In databases, **subject terms** can help you identify keywords.
- Use OR to search for multiple related terms at the same time.
(e.g. policy OR law)

2. Too Many Search Terms

Databases can be picky about search terms. Be selective.

- Begin with one or two search terms that best represent your topic.
Then add other terms as needed.
- Avoid long phrases and empty words like “the” and “how.”

3. Too Many Limiters

If you limited the search (e.g. by date or search field), remove the limiters and reassess.

4. Narrow Topic

For highly specific topics, you may locate sources on a broader related topic.

Examples: • **Narrow search:** Bloomington Indiana AND environmental policy

• **Broader search:** United States AND state government AND environmental policy

5. Database Choice

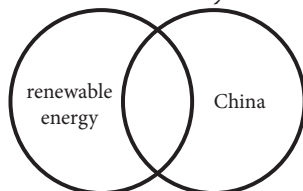
Different databases focus on different topics. Try the “Subjects” tab on the IUB Libraries homepage to view resources for different subjects.

MORE SEARCH TIPS

Boolean Operators

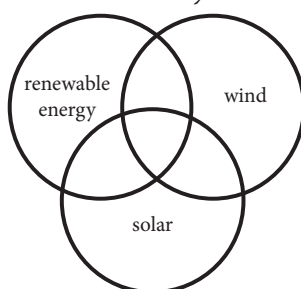
Most library databases use Boolean operators (**AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**). You can use them to **broaden** or **narrow** your search results.

AND searches for records that use both terms and narrows your results.



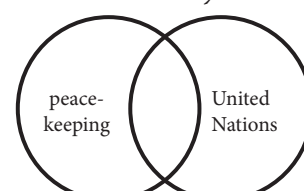
Renewable energy AND China

OR searches for records that use either term and broadens your results.



Renewable energy OR wind OR solar

NOT excludes words from the search and narrows your results.



Peacekeeping NOT United Nations

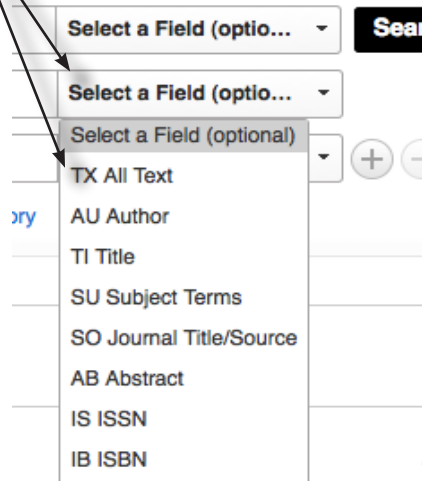
Database Search Fields

Records in library databases are made of “fields.” Fields can help you **nar-row** your search.

Examples:

- author
- date/year of publication
- title
- subject/descriptor
- abstract
- all text (searches the full text, if available)

Search fields in OneSearch



Improving Search Results With Fields

- Most databases automatically search by keyword (looking for the term anywhere in the record).
- Limit the search field for a term to narrow results.
- Fields are usually in drop down menus.
- If the database has a single search box with no drop down menu, look for an “Advanced Search” option.

Phrase Searching

Use quotation marks or parentheses around search words to search for a phrase.

Example: “*united nations peacekeeping forces*”

Nesting

Use parentheses to put search words into sets.

Terms in parentheses are processed first. Use nesting with **AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**.

Example:
success AND (education OR employment)

Truncation

Broaden your search to include variant word endings and spellings. Enter the root of the word then the truncation symbol [usually an asterisk (*)].

Example: *elect** = *election, electoral, elections*

Wildcards

Substitute a symbol for just one character. The most commonly used wildcard symbol is a question mark (?).

Example: *wom?n* = *woman, women*