
Searching electronic resources

Background

Some resources (such as Google, Google Scholar and Google Books) allow you to do a natural language search, such as “is there a link between violence in the media and crime?” On most electronic databases you will need to pick out the keywords for your chosen topic and then link them with Boolean operators, such as AND, NOT and OR

Example: keywords

The keywords in the topic “*is there a link between violence in the media and crime*” could be: violence, media and crime. As well as searching for these keywords, you should also think of synonyms (words with the same meaning).

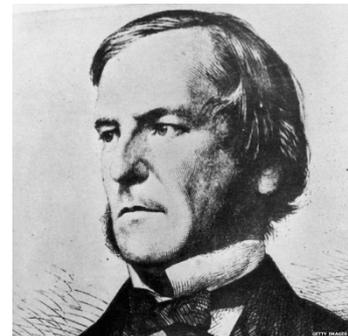
The following table illustrates the idea of keywords and synonyms.

Keywords →			
Synonyms ↓	Violence	Media	Crime
	Fighting	Television	Criminal
	Aggression	Radio	Lawbreaking
	Cruelty	Broadcasting	Wrongdoing

You should also consider alternative spellings, for example American spellings such as color for colour, acronyms such as TV for television, as well as alternative words, such as automobile for car.

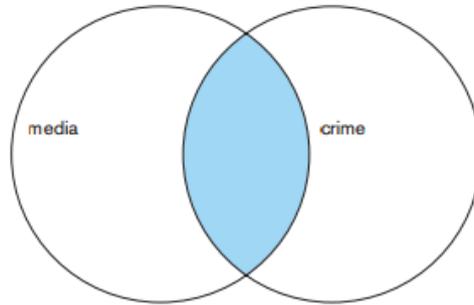
Boolean Logic

Boolean logic was devised by English mathematician George Boole and can be used to combine keywords to effectively search electronic information: returning relevant results whilst eliminating insignificant results. There are three main Boolean operators: AND, OR and NOT



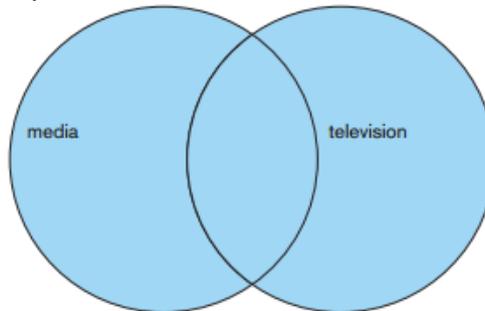
- In **Google**, a **space** is used for **AND**, **OR** is used for **OR**, and **-** is used for **NOT**.
- To search for a phrase put speech marks “ ” at the beginning of the phrase and at the end of the last word in the phrase required (this method of phrase searching also works in Boolean searching).
- Google will automatically search for synonyms: if you would like Google to search for the exact word you have typed then include a + sign (followed by no space) ahead of the word, eg, **+car**.
- **AND** is used to join search terms when you want both terms to be present in a record, so it is used to combine the different concepts in your search. This can be illustrated as follows: Eg, **media AND crime** (when searching Google you could use: media crime).

If you wanted media and crime as exact words you would type **+media +crime** when searching Google).



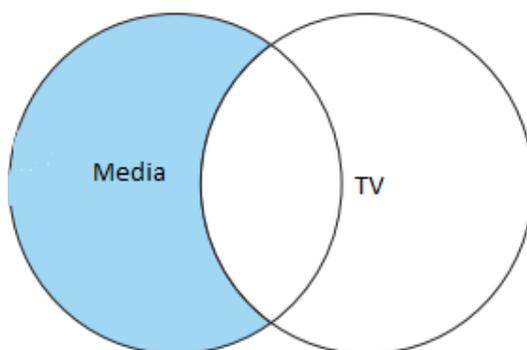
The shaded area represents the articles you want, with both the word media and the word crime in them.

- **OR** is used to combine synonyms, i.e., words with the same or similar meanings. It will find articles containing **either** or **both** words. E.g., **media OR television** (when doing this search on Google you would use **media OR television**).



This search finds articles with the word media, or with the word television, or with both words (in the intersection in the middle).

- **NOT** is used to remove concepts from your search. The term following **NOT** must be absent from the item in order for the record to be returned.



E.g., **Media NOT TV** (when doing this search on Google you would use **Media-TV**)

Therefore, this search will retrieve all documents with the term Media, but will eliminate any which also have the term TV. NB: the **NOT** search should be used with caution as it may eliminate articles which would otherwise have been useful.