A Study of Information Search Strategies

Manoj Omprakash Bhati

Introduction:

Search strategies are ways of using search terms in finding required information from search tools, such as search engines (Google), the library catalogue and online databases. To achieve good search results, it is necessary to use search strategies. The following are some of the most common search strategies that are applicable to various searching tools.

• Boolean Logic

• Parenthesis

• Phrase searching

• Truncation

• Wildcards

• Field searching

A Boolean operator refers to the logical use of algebraic terms involving two or more values. Boolean operators are used in computer database searching to connect research concepts. Boolean operators generally use only three words: and, or, and not. Here is how they work. "AND" narrows the search topic because both concepts must be in each record. If we specify violin *and* repetitive stress injury *and* wrists, the database will give us a list of sources in which all three concepts are mentioned.

"OR" broadens the search topic because records containing one or both of the terms are included. If you need to broaden your topic, add synonyms or other phrases to the search strategy. "NOT" eliminates unrelated records containing the concept. Concept 1 *not* Concept 2-repetitive stress injury *not* carpal tunnel syndrome Once you have set up a search strategy, you're ready to take the next step, finding background information on your topic.

Encyclopedias and Dictionaries: You can find encyclopedias and dictionaries for specific topics by using the Library Catalog, by consulting a Reference Bibliography (an annotated bibliography of selected sources on a specific subject), or by asking a librarian to suggest appropriate titles. For more general background you may wish to consult Encyclopedia Britannica Online.

Bibliographies:

Read the background information and note any useful sources (books, journals, magazines) listed in the bibliography at the end of the encyclopedia article or dictionary entry. Sources cited in the bibliography are good starting points for further research. Look up these sources in the Library Catalog and periodical indexes. Check the subject headings listed in the subject field of the online record for these books and articles. Then do subject searches using those subject headings to locate additional titles.

Phrase Searching

Most systems provide a method for you to search for a phrase - that is, to find two or more words side-by-side. This is an extremely important and powerful search technique for making sure that your search results are focused on your topic. To search for two words side-by-side, place quotation marks around the phrase. For example, "sex discrimination" However, other search systems may require the use of some sort of connector word.

Nesting

Nesting is the use of parenthesis to separate parts of your search phrase, thereby letting the computer know the order by which it is to conduct the search. For example you want information on pest and weed control for tomatoes. You could perform two searches Tomato AND pest and tomato AND weed

By nesting, however, you can combine these searches into one. You need the term tomato and you also want the term pest or the term weed. By combining the terms, your search query will look like this. The computer will first find all sources with the term pest or weed. Then it will limit those results to the items that also contain tomato. If you did not use the parenthesis, a search for tomato AND pest OR weed may have brought back the results you wanted or it may have brought back the terms tomato and pest plus those that had weed without tomato.

Wildcard:

The wildcard is an advanced search technique that can be used to maximize your search results in library databases. Wildcards are used in search terms to represent one or more other characters. The two most commonly used wildcards are: An asterisk (*) may be used to specify any number of characters

Truncation

Truncation is also called stemming, is a technique that broadens your search to include various word endings and spellings. To use truncation, enter the root of a word and

put the truncation symbol at the end. The database will return results that include any ending of that root word

Google :

Internet searches, such as using the search engine 'Google' will give Neo different types of information than searching a scholarly journal database.

Recognise official links as opposed to commercial websites.

• .edu (It sometimes means it is related to educational or research material)

• .gov (It usually means it is related to government resources).

• .org (It usually is related to official organisations, eg. United Nations)

Google will also provide 'related searches' that might help Neo to narrow down his research topic. For example, Neo needs information on the postmodern theorist Fredric Jameson. Scroll down to bottom of the page and look at what type of information it provides. This might help him to narrow down his search.

• Put quotation marks "__" around words that one wants to search as a phrase; i.e. "semiotics analysis"

• To remove a word from a search, use the hyphen (minus sign) - just in front of the word; i.e. semiotics theorists

• -Barthes (excludes search term)

• -COM will remove commercial sites from one's results.

• To search colleges & university sites, use site: edu as part of one's search. Neo can use site: with any domain. Must be a lower case (s) in site. No suffixes. E.g site:newyorktimes.com.

• A plus + symbol in front of a word means the word will definitely be in the search; i.e. +"barthes"

• .. Shows all results from within the designated time range, e.g 2008..2013.