

How to search the World Wide Web

Keyword Search Operators

Operators are the rules or specific instructions used for composing a query in a keyword search. A well-defined query greatly improves the chances of finding the information you are looking for. While each search engine has its own operators, some operators are used in common by a number of search engines. The following are among the most used operators.

1. Boolean

Employs AND, OR, NEAR and NOT to connect words and phrases [i.e. terms] in the query where:

- **AND** requires that both terms are present somewhere within the document being sought.
- **NEAR** requires that one term must be found within a certain number of words of the other term.
- **OR** requires that at least one of the terms is present.
- **NOT** excludes any document containing the term.

When using these operators, remember to capitalize them as shown above.

Query Example: *search AND tutorial*

2. Plus / Minus

- Employs [+] before a term to retrieve only the documents containing that term. It is similar to the Boolean AND.
- Employs [-] before a term to exclude that term from the search. It is similar to the Boolean NOT.
- Do not leave a space between the operator and the term that follows.

Query Example: *+search +tutorial -course*

3. Phrases

- Words enclosed within double quote marks denote an exact phrase, or reasonably close to it. It is sometimes similar to the Boolean NEAR. More often, it is treated like a single term.

Query Example: *"tutorial for beginners"*

4. Stemming [Truncation]

- The use of the stem or the main part of a word to search for variations of the word [e.g. the stem "sing" searches sings, singer, singing and singalong]. Stemming can be automatic, or it may require use of a *wild card*, symbolized by an asterisk [*] to initiate.

Query Example: *sing**

5. Case Sensitive

- Use lower case for query terms except for proper names.
- Treat adjacent capitalized words as a single proper name, e. g. George Washington.
- Separate proper names from each other a comma.

Query Example: *George Washington, Thomas Jefferson*