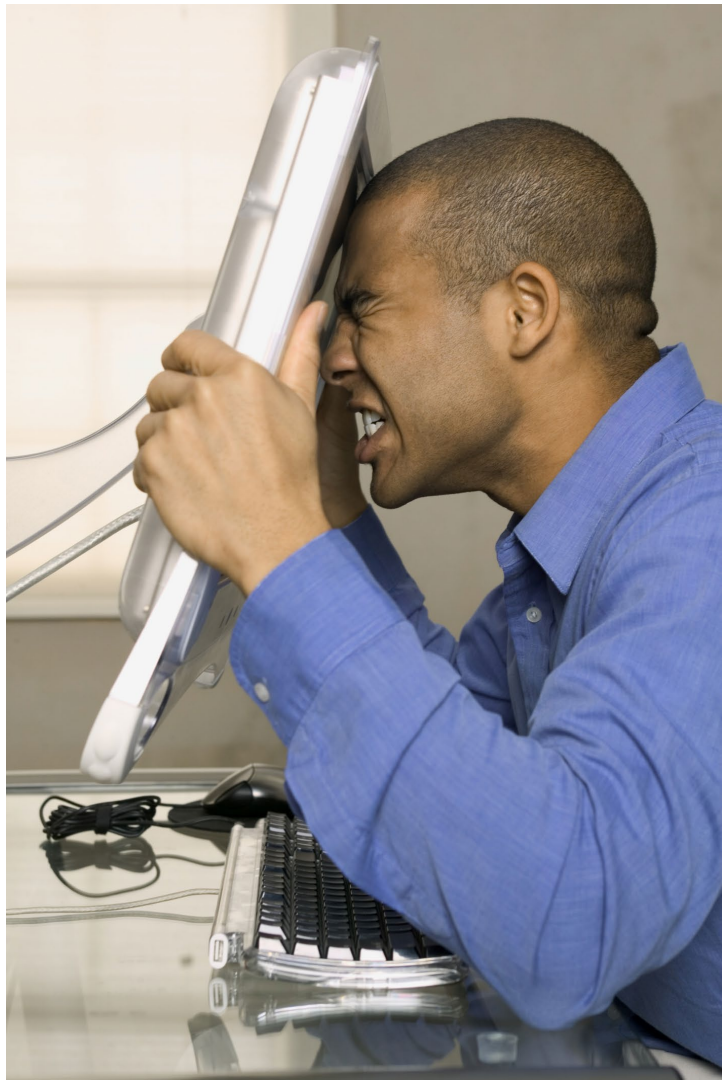
SEARCH STRATEGIES: TERMS AND CONNECTORS

Miami Law Library

Legal Research Refresher Summer 2020



How do you develop keywords?

How do you develop keywords?

You can develop a research question using the facts of the situation you are presented.

Categories:

- **People**
  - Defined in terms of their legal relationships or obligations
- **Place**
  - The geographic location controls what jurisdiction applies.
  - The location can also affect which legal rules apply.
- **Things**
  - Tangible- eg. car
  - Intangible- eg. vacation
  - Cause of Action- eg. negligence, crime, breach of contract

Let's define your research question

Casey lives in a condominium he purchased five years ago. The condo is located in Miami Beach. Casey arrived home yesterday to find his home flooded. All his furniture and laminate flooring is destroyed. It appears that his neighbor upstairs left the water running in the bath tub and it overflowed. Casey has asked you if he can recover any damages.

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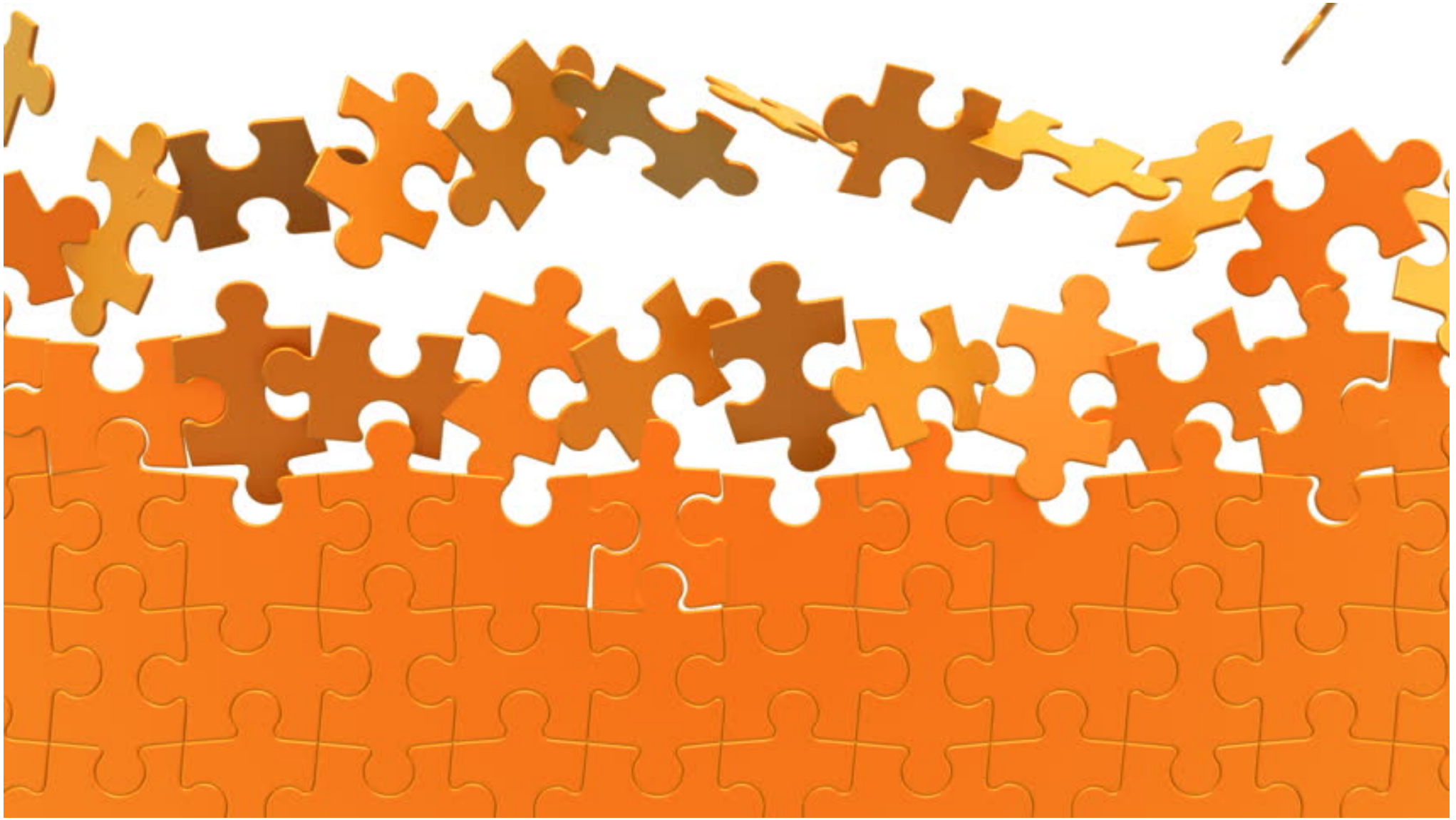
In Florida, can a condominium owner recover damages for water damage caused by a neighbor's actions?

People – Place – Things



Natural Language

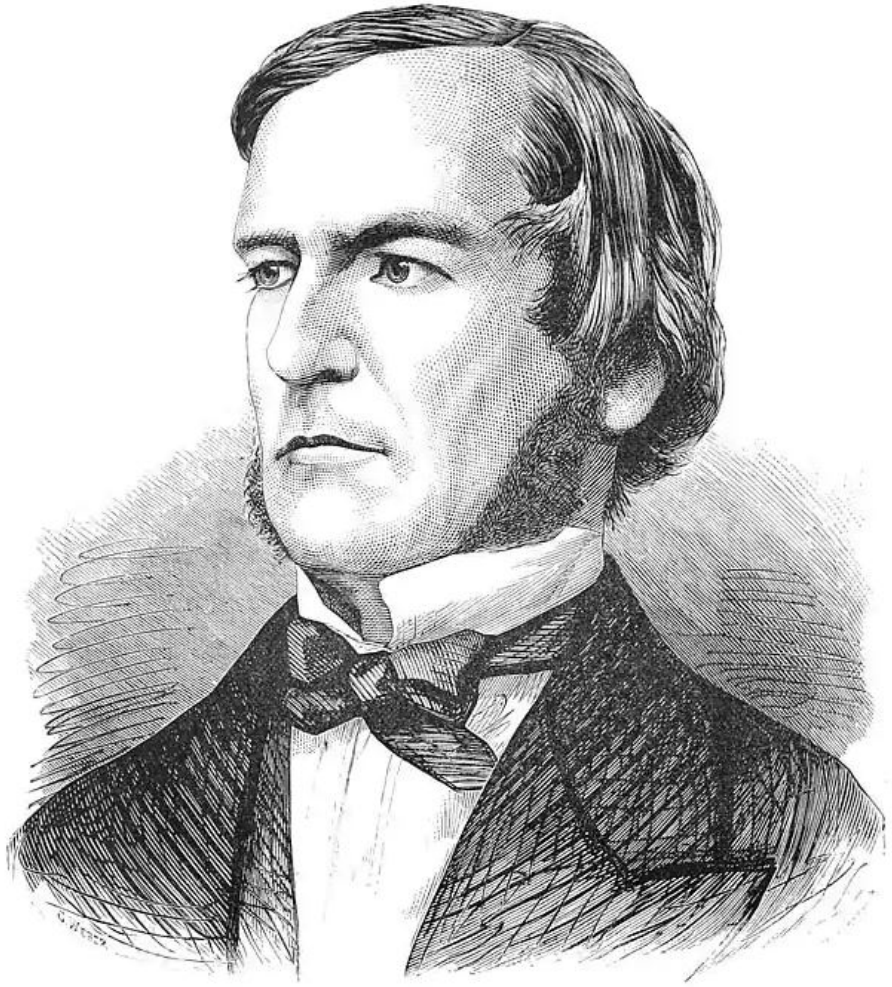
vs.

Boolean

NATURAL LANGUAGE SEARCHING

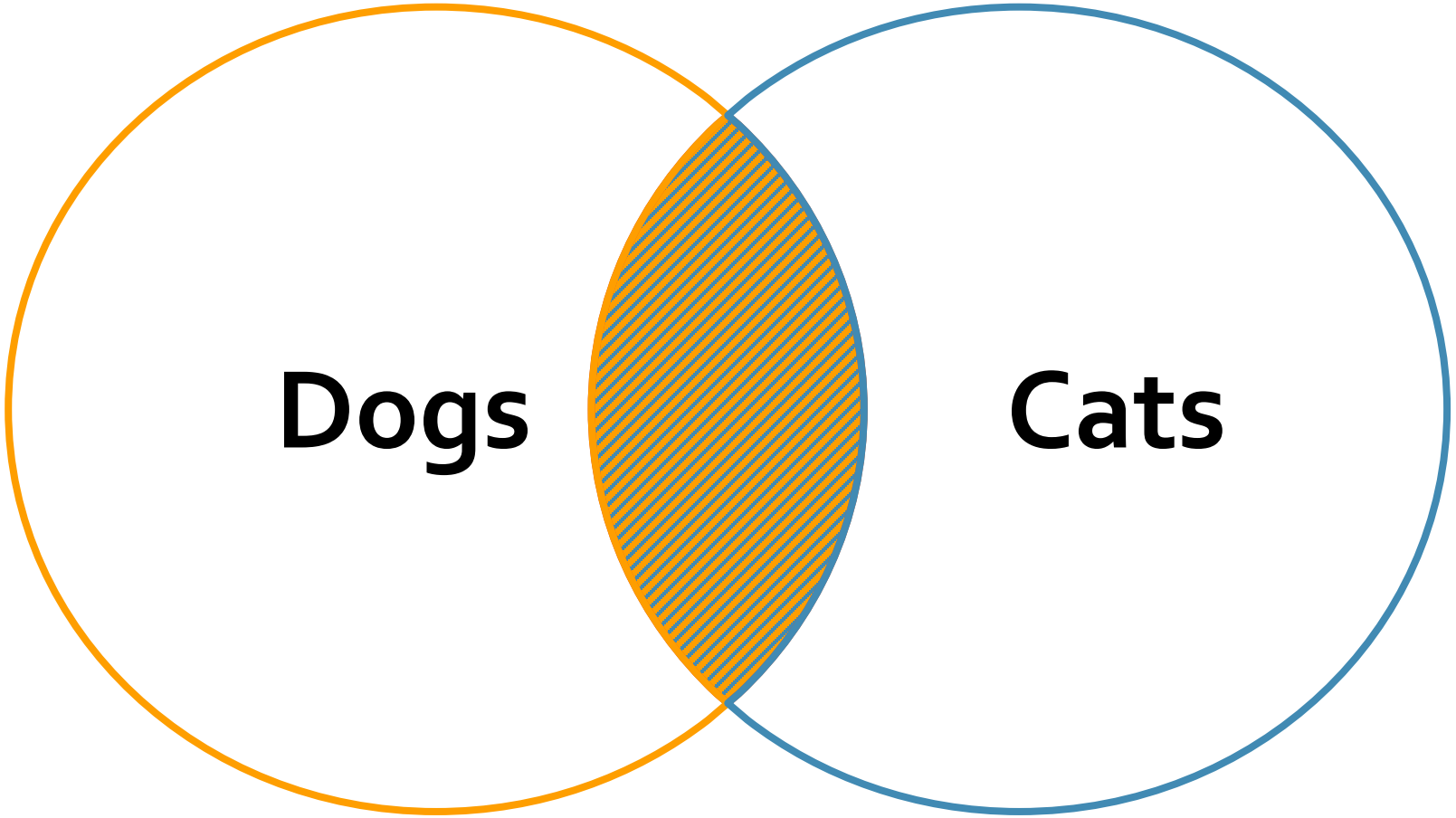
- Default method of search in most search engines
- A **probability formula** is used to determine the results according to the language in your search.
- This type of search puts
  - **more control** in the hands of **probability algorithms**
  - **less control** in the hands of the **researcher**.

BOOLEAN SEARCHING



- More sophisticated search method available in most academic databases.
- Some basic Boolean operators function in search engines like Google.
- The search is based on controlled relationships between the search terms.
- This type of search puts
  - **more control** in the hands of the **researcher**
  - **less control** in the hands of the **probability algorithms.**

and



"global warming"

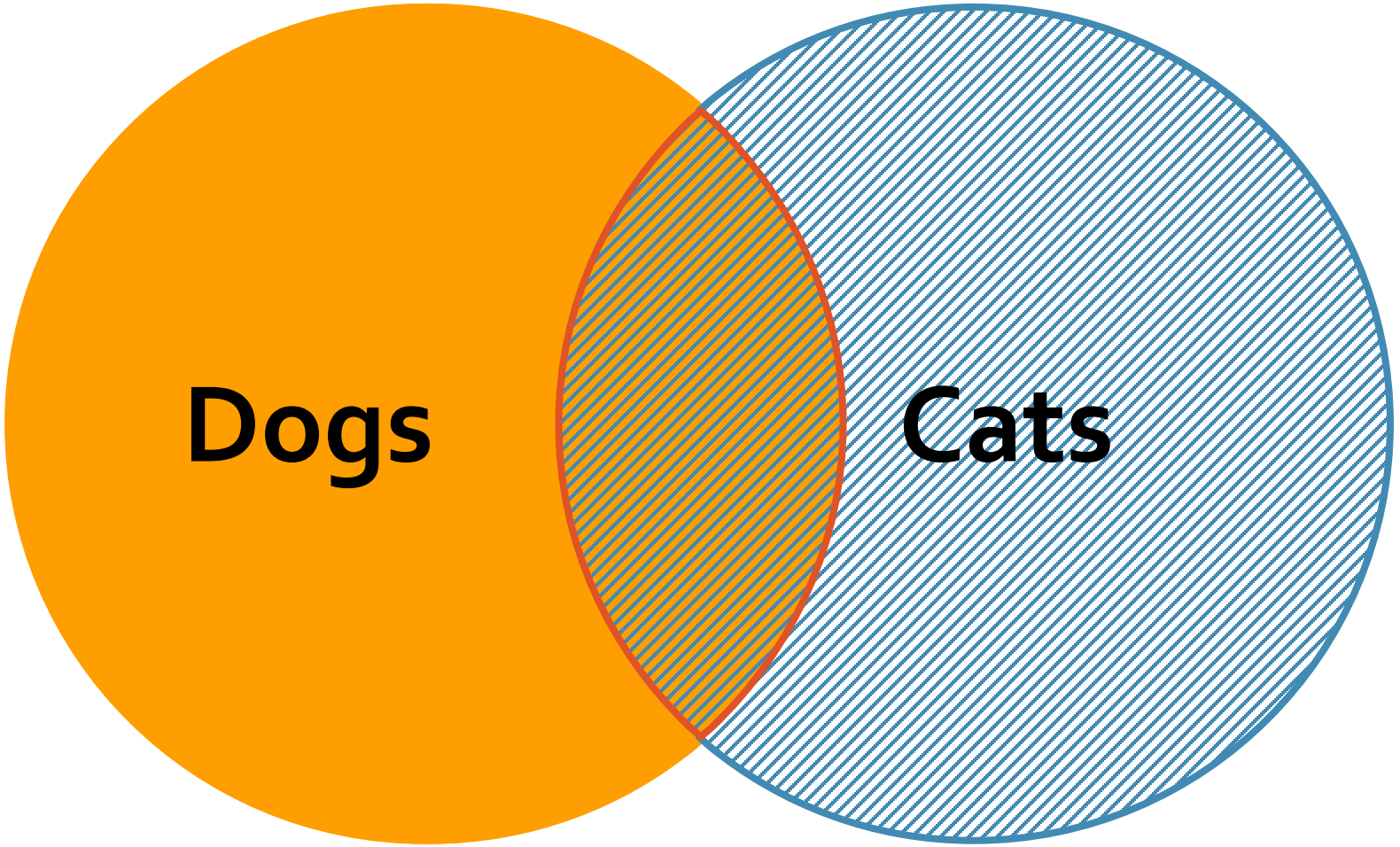
and

"sea level rise"

and

California

or

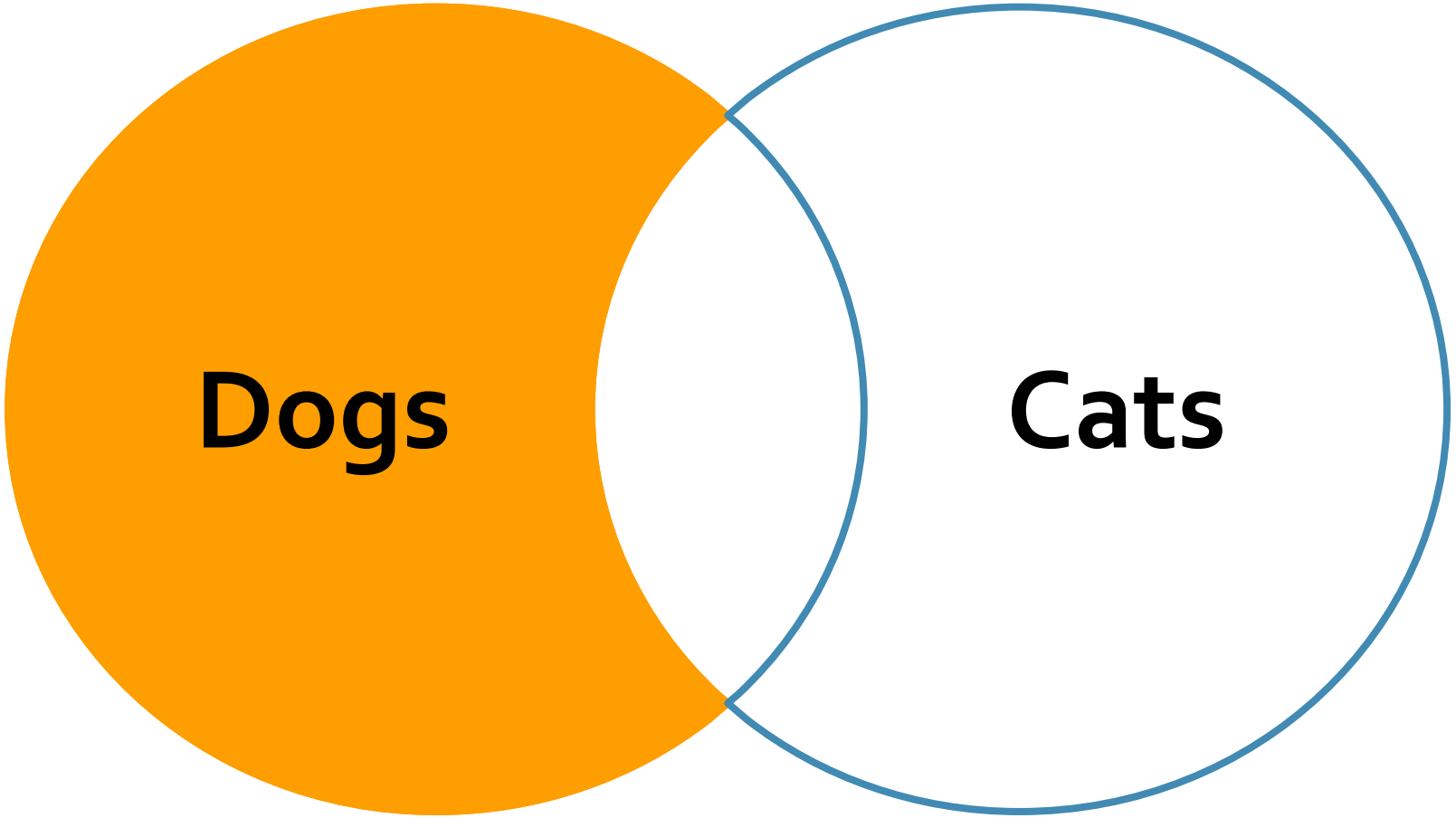


"global warming"

or

"greenhouse effect"

not



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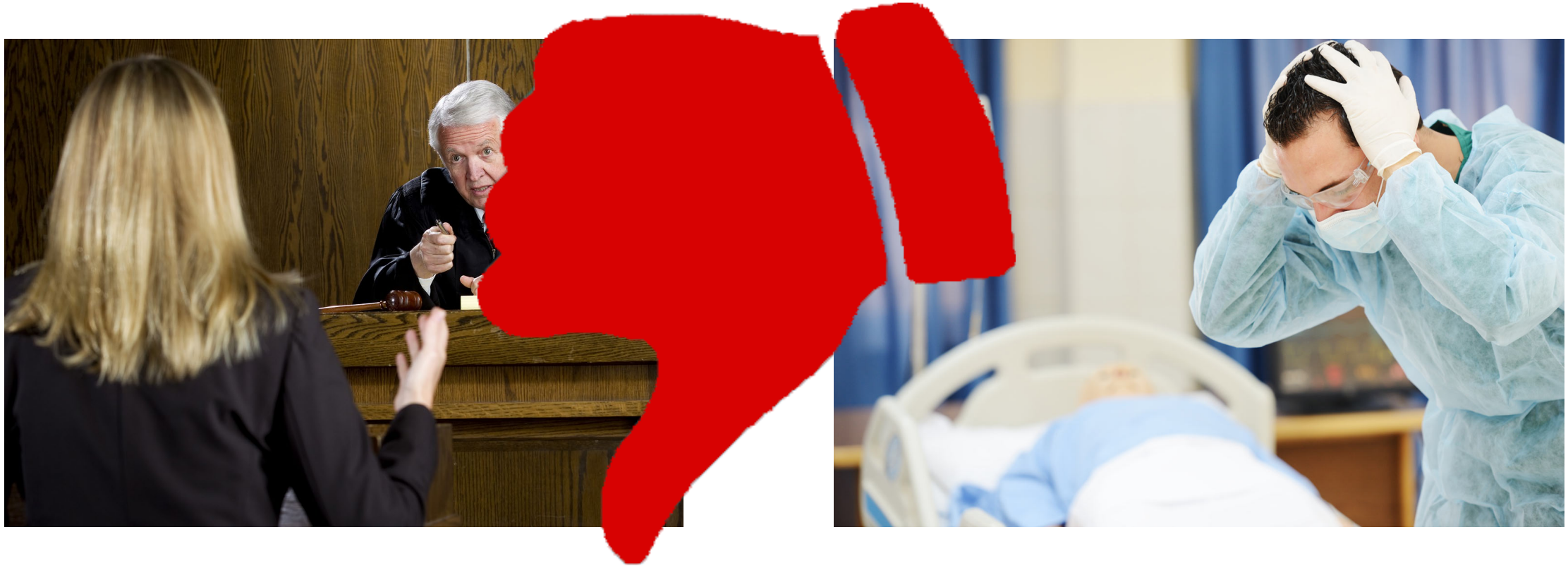
Attorney and Malpractice

Attorney and Malpractice



Proximity Connectors

/p

Search for terms within the same paragraph

attorney /p malpractice

/s

Search for terms within the same sentence

attorney /s malpractice

/#

Search for terms within a specified number of words from each other

attorney /5 malpractice

attorney /20 malpractice

+p

Search for terms within the same paragraph where the first term appears before the second

attorney +p malpractice

+s

Search for terms within the same sentence where the first term appears before the second

attorney +s malpractice

+#

Search for terms within a specified number of words where the first term appears before the second

attorney +5 malpractice

attorney +20 malpractice

How to work with

Word Variations

Root Expander

!

depreciat!

depreciate, depreciated, depreciating, depreciation

Root Expander

!

harass!

harass, harassment, harassed, harassing

Wildcard Character

*

dr*nk

drink, drank, drunk

bl**d

blood, bleed,blind, blond

Phrases

\\ //

"attractive nuisance"

"double jeopardy"

"biological and chemical weapons"

biological weapons, chemical weapons, chemical and biological weapons

Plurals

- A search for the singular form of a word will search for both the singular and plural forms

  dog will retrieve dog and dogs

- A search for the plural form of a word will search for only the plural

  dogs will only retrieve dogs

- System DOES search both regular and most irregular plurals

  woman will retrieve woman and women

  fungus will retrieve fungus and fungi

Stop or Noise Words

a, an, as, on, under, with, the

"The dog bite caused an injury"

Searches for

"dog bite caused injury"

Spaces

Westlaw

A space is interpreted as an "or" connector

Lexis

A space is typically interpreted as an "and" connector but may be affected by other connectors present in the search

Order of Operation

Westlaw

- " "
- OR
- Proximity connectors +#,/#,+s, /s, +p, /p smallest to biggest #, then s, then p
- AND
- NOT

Lexis

- NOT
- OR
- Proximity connectors /#, /s, /p left to right
- AND

Order of Operation

Your client's teacup Yorkie bit a house guest, causing "severe" injury.

Order of Operation

Your client's teacup Yorkie bit a house guest, causing "severe" injury.

TERMS

dog **pet** **bite**

Order of Operation

Your client's teacup Yorkie bit a house guest, causing "severe" injury.

TERMS

dog or pet and bite

Order of Operation

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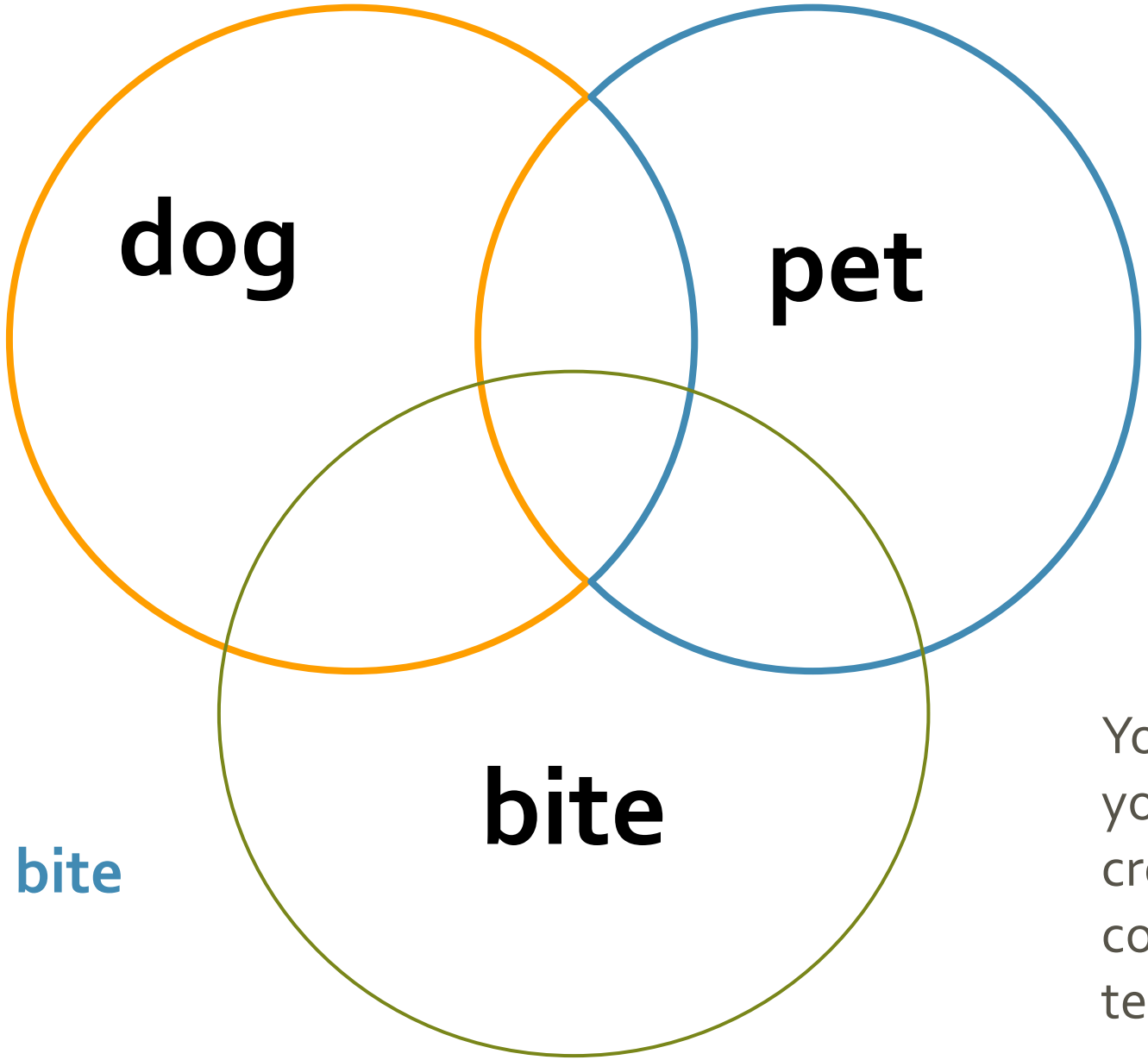
Order of Operation

How do you solve this problem?

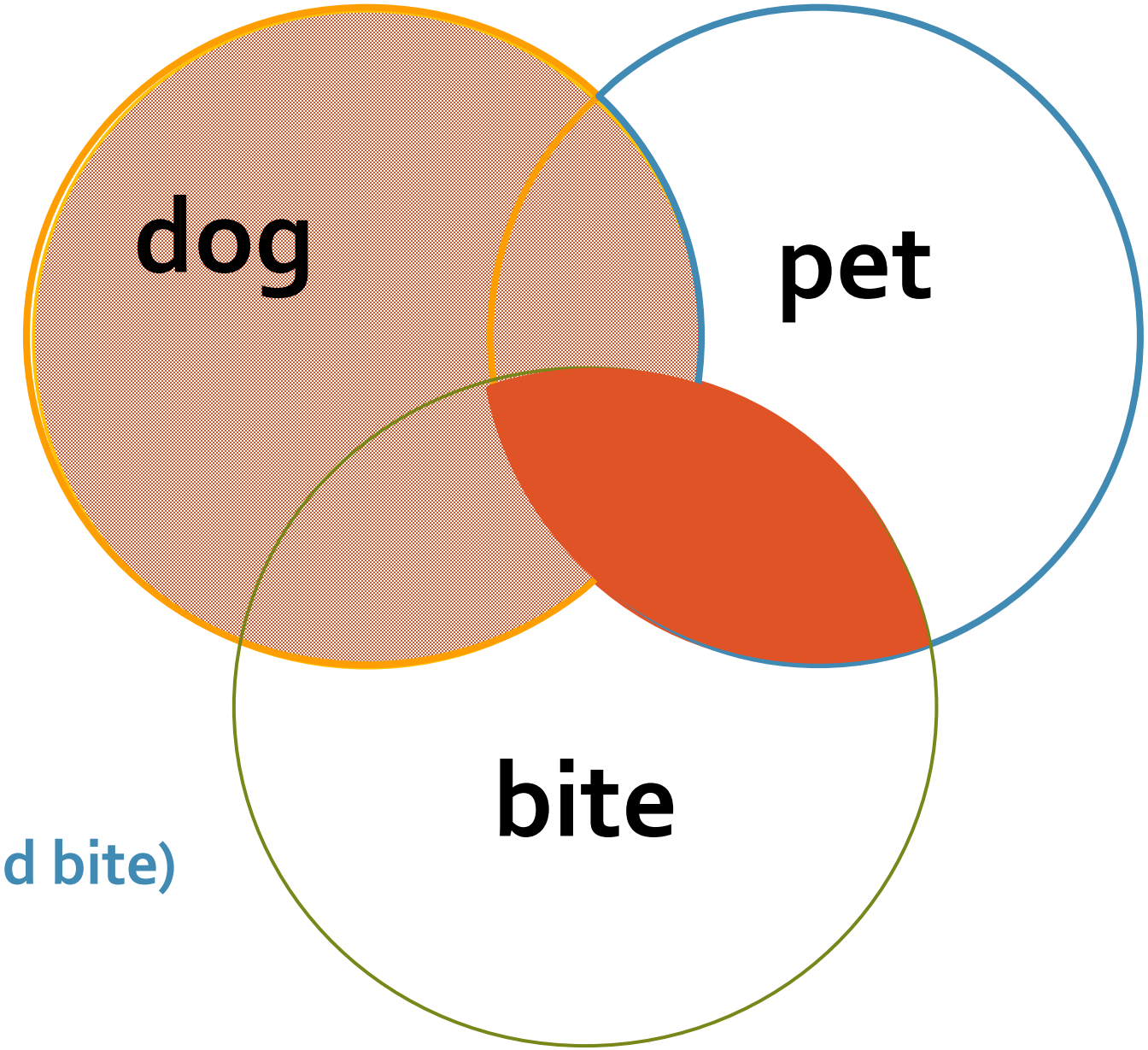
ALGEBRA

( )

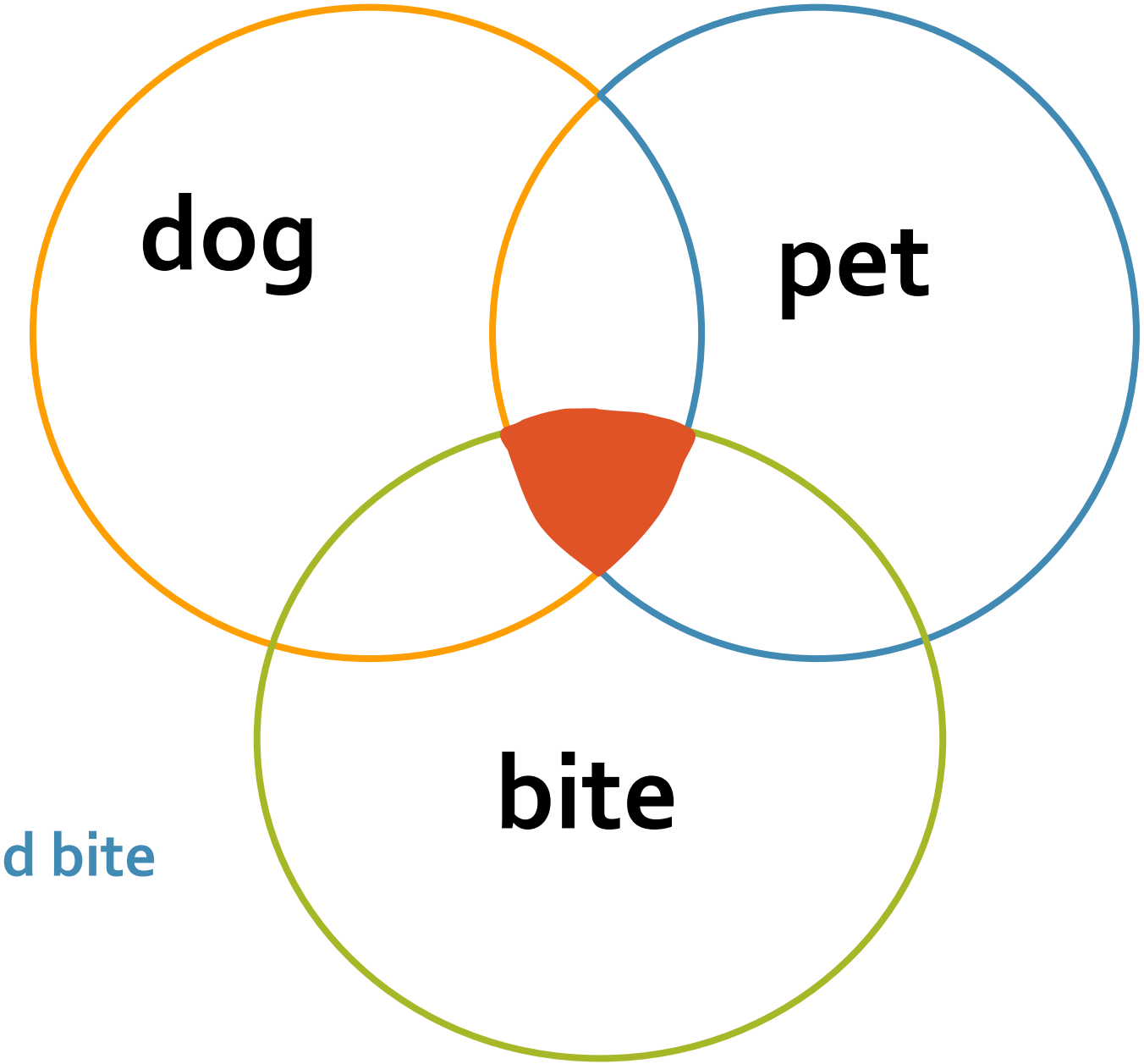


dog or pet and bite

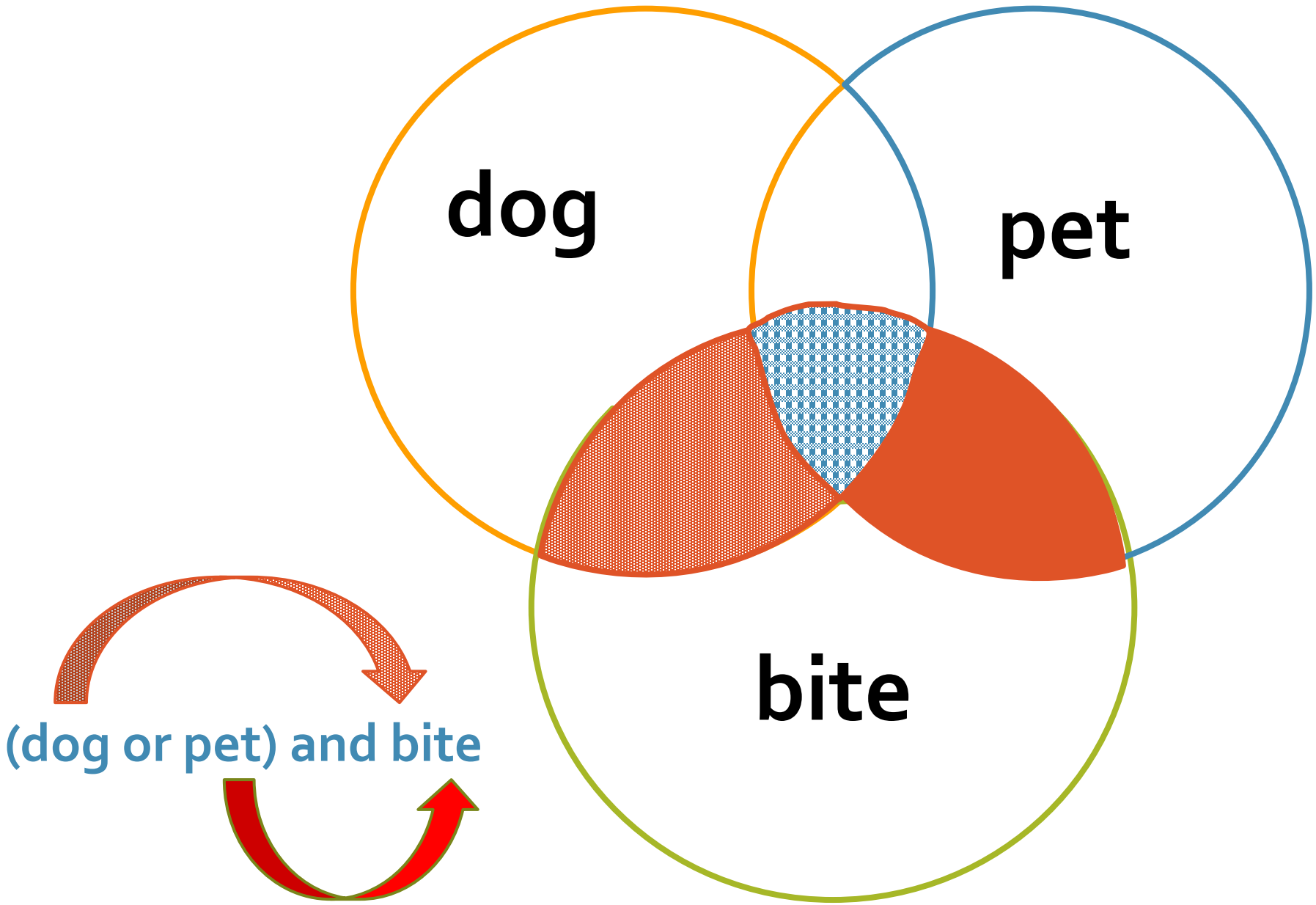
You can also nest your operators, to create more complex search terms



dog or (pet and bite)



dog and pet and bite


dog
pet
bite
(dog or pet) and bite

Ambiguity

Synonymy

Synonymy

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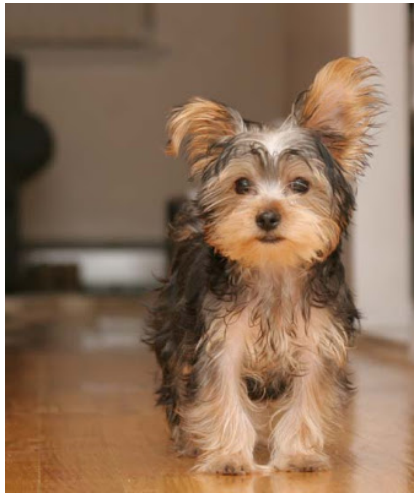


Synonymy

Canine

Domestic Animal

Dog

Pet

Rottweiler

Yorkshire Terrier

Ambiguity

Ambiguity

Dissolution

Ambiguity

Counselor

How effective is my search?

Precision

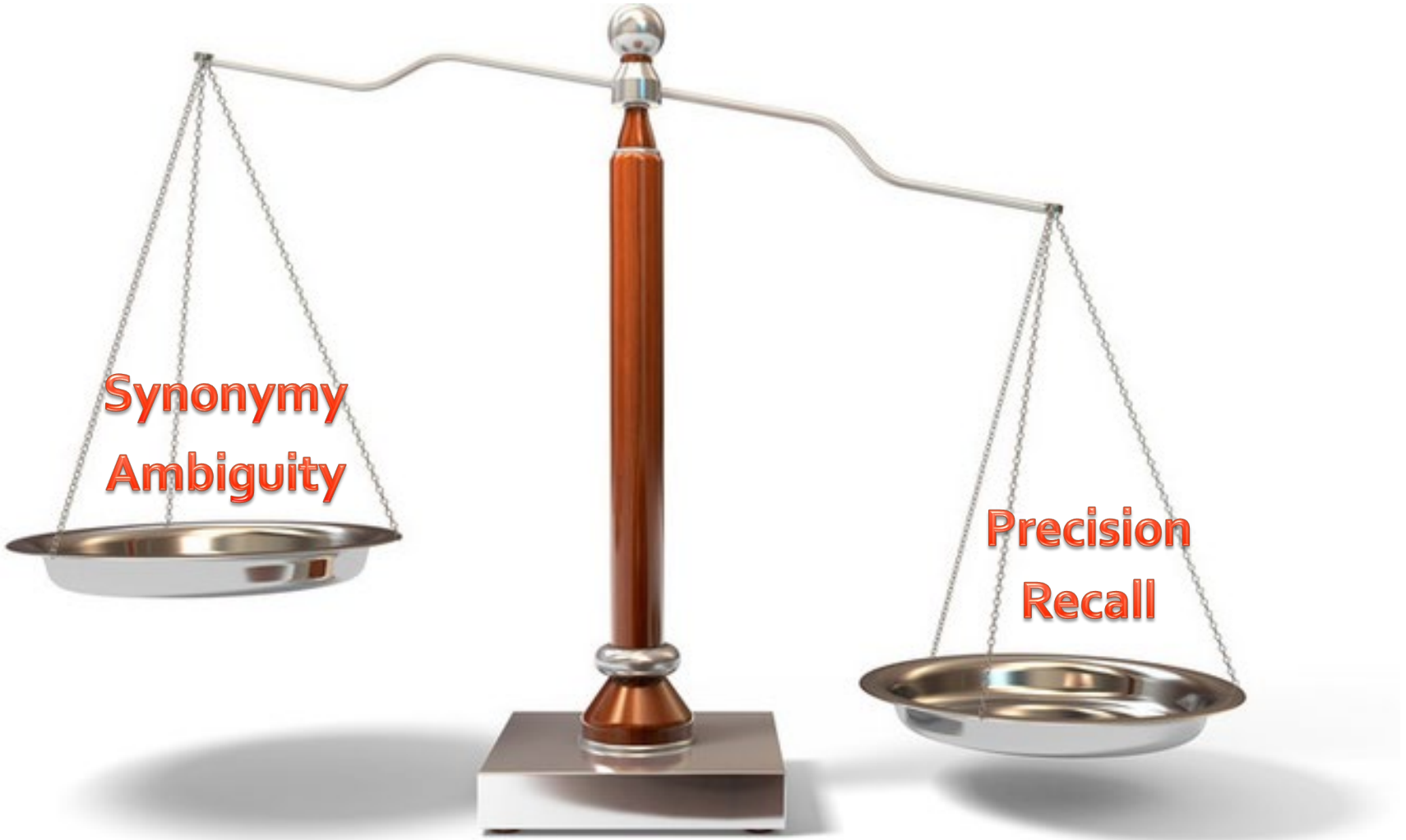
*Finding **ONLY** what you want to find*
For example:

Recall

*Finding **EVERYTHING** you want to find*
For example:

counselor

attorney
barrister
lawyer
litigator



DIFFICULTIES

GOALS

Attorney and Malpractice

(attorney or lawyer) /10 malpractice

Example

Casey lives in a condominium he purchased five years ago. Casey arrived home yesterday to find his home flooded. All his furniture and laminate flooring is destroyed. It appears that his neighbor upstairs left the water running in the bath tub and it overflowed. Casey has asked you if he can recover any damages.

Example

Casey lives in a condominium he purchased five years ago. Casey arrived home yesterday to find his home **flooded**. All his furniture and laminate flooring is destroyed. It appears that his neighbor upstairs left the **water running** in the bath tub and it overflowed. Casey has asked you if he can recover any damages.

Flood

Water Intrusion

Water Damage

Leak

Example

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PollEv.com/biancaanders607

Terms & Connectors Cheat Sheet

What it does	Westlaw	Lexis	Bloomberg	Hein
Either term can be present (broader)	or	or	OR	OR
Both terms must be present (narrower)	and &	and	AND	AND
Exclude term after the connector	but not %	and not	NOT AND NOT BUT NOT	NOT
Searches within the same paragraph	/p	w/p /p	P/ /P /PARA	
Searches within the same sentence	/s	w/s /s	S/ /S /SENT	
Searches within *x number* of words	/#	w/# /#	N/# /# W/#	~#
Ordered proximity: first term must appear before term after connector	+p +s +#	PRE/#	NP/# Pre/# +#	
Parentheses: clarify order of connector processing	( )	( )	( )	( )
Root Expander	!	! *	!	*
Single Character Wildcard	*	? *	*	?
Phrase: searches terms exactly as they appear within the quotes	" "	" "	" "	" "
Frequency of a term	ATLEAST#( )	ATLEAST#( )	ATL# ATLEAST#	
At Most			ATMn	
Makes term more important to search				^n

Contact Information

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