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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Let’s define your research question

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

Dogs

Cats
“global warming” and “sea level rise” and California
or

Dogs

Cats
“global warming”

or

“greenhouse effect”
not

Dogs

Cats
“global warming” and “sea level rise” not California
Attorney and Malpractice
Proximity Connectors
Search for terms within the same paragraph

Search for terms within the same sentence

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

attorney /p malpractice

attorney /s malpractice

attorney /5 malpractice

attorney /20 malpractice
Search for terms within the same paragraph where the first term appears before the second

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

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

attorney +p malpractice

attorney +s malpractice

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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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 or pet) and bite
Ambiguity

Synonymy
Synonymy
Synonymy
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:

- attorney
- barrister
- counselor
- lawyer
- litigator
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 bathtub 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.
Water Damage

Water Intrusion

Flood

Leak

Water Damage
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 bathtub and it overflowed. Casey has asked you if he can recover any damages.

PollEv.com/biancaanders607
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Westlaw</th>
<th>Lexis</th>
<th>Bloomberg</th>
<th>Hein</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Either term can be present (broader)</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both terms must be present (narrower)</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>AND</td>
<td>AND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclude term after the connector</td>
<td>but not</td>
<td>and not</td>
<td>NOT</td>
<td>NOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searches within the same paragraph</td>
<td>/p</td>
<td>w/p</td>
<td>P/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searches within the same sentence</td>
<td>/s</td>
<td>w/s</td>
<td>S/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searches within a specific number of words</td>
<td>/#</td>
<td>w/#</td>
<td>N/#</td>
<td>~#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordered proximity: first term before term after</td>
<td>+p</td>
<td>+s</td>
<td>PRE/#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parentheses: clarify order of connector processing</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Expander</td>
<td>l</td>
<td></td>
<td>l</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Character Wildcard</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase: searches terms exactly as they appear</td>
<td>&quot;&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;&quot;</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of a term</td>
<td>ATLEAST#( )</td>
<td>ATLEAST#( )</td>
<td>ATLEAST#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Most</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ATM#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes term more important to search</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>^n</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Contact Information

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banderson@law.miami.edu