Advanced Searching Skills

The techniques described here can help you search for information more strategically and save time in your research process. Most databases utilize these or similar advanced features to help users create precise searches.

Search tips

**Exact quote/phrase** - use this to return results with the exact search phrase. Examples: "mobile operating system" "renewable energy"

**Truncation** - searches for variations of the root word. For example, financ* searches for financing, financial, etc.

**Wildcards** - substitute a symbol for one letter of a word to return results with variations on that word. Example: wom!n searches for woman or women.

**Connectors** - and/or/not- these help to expand or narrow your search. Join terms together with and, expand the search with or, and refine the search with not. Or is helpful when you need to include synonyms in a search. Example bankruptcy or insolvency.

**Nesting** - nesting lets the searcher control the way the search terms are grouped. This method uses parentheses to nest search terms within another search string. This is especially helpful with synonyms. Example: (dogs OR puppies OR canine) AND (cats OR kittens OR feline)

**Proximity** - many databases offer a proximity search feature. Proximity operators help to return results that are more closely aligned with your topic, because proximity searching allows you to specify the maximum number of words between your search terms. The search syntax sometimes varies depending on the resource. 
*Business Source Complete* uses the near operator (N) and the within operator (W.) The search tax N5 reform returns results that include tax reform, reform of income tax, and any other results in which the words tax and reform appear within five words of each other, regardless of order. Use the within operator when the order matters. The within operator (W) finds words in the order in which you enter them. In this case, tax W5 reform would return results that match tax reform but not reform of income tax.
*ABI/Inform Complete* offers the near operator. In this resource, the syntax must be entered with a forward slash: tax N/5 reform.
*LexisNexis* uses the within operator and the syntax is entered in this way: business loss w/10 tax deduction

The above search options can be used in combination: 
"American Apparel" N/5 (bankruptcy OR insolvency)
**Database features**

**Expanders, limiters** - most databases offer an advanced search that gives searchers choices for expanding or limiting a search query. Options can include limiting by document type (article, book review, editorial, interview,) publication type (academic journal, SWOT analysis, industry profile,) publication date, language, and more. Searches in academic databases can also be limited to return only scholarly (peer reviewed) results.

**Help** - all databases have a 'help' section. Use it! As noted on this page, search options vary from database to database. Optimize your time by learning the options available to return the most relevant results for your research.

**Citations** - most databases have citation tools help you cite articles in your chosen format. Caution: be sure to double check these citations; they're not always completely correct.

**Thesaurus**

In Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform, the contains the subject headings assigned to the content within the databases. By originating your search in the thesaurus, you can potentially receive results more targeted to your search query. Use the thesaurus to look up your search terms or phrases. The thesaurus will indicate how the database defines the topic and also gives broader and narrower terms. You might find that one of the broader or narrower terms is a better match.

You can also construct your search from within the thesaurus by selecting terms as you go.

Example:
A search for income tax in the thesaurus of ABI/Inform reveals subject headings including corporate income tax, deferred income taxes, taxable income, and more.

**TU Link**

Some databases don't include the full-text of articles. When there's no full-text, click on the **TU Link** button. This will search through the library's full-text holdings in other databases and give you a link to the full-text of the article. If there is no online access, there's a link to the library catalog to see if we have the full-text in print. If none of Tulane's libraries have the full-text in print, there will be a link to **Interlibrary Loan**.

**Strategies**

When you find an article that's exactly what you are looking for, try these tips to further your search:

**Mine the bibliography** - this is especially helpful if you need to complete a thorough review of the literature on a topic. Review the article's bibliography to find additional books and articles on the topic.

**Review subject headings** - database editors review articles and assign headings based on the main subjects/topics discussed. From the search results page, navigate to the detailed record to view the subject headings assigned to the article. Make note of these as you proceed in your research. Subject headings might include broader or narrower terms or phrases that can uncover additional sources.