Boolean Operators

Boolean operators are simple words like AND, OR and NOT, and symbols like ( ), and * that help you expand or narrow your search results. Paired with simple, targeted keywords they can make searching for resources much more fruitful.

“Quotation Marks" allow you to search adjacent words as a phrase.

Example: “Story Quilt" instead of Story Quilt

AND narrows your search by requiring that all the keywords are found in the search results. The more terms you enter the more targeted your results become.

Example: Feminism AND Art AND “African-American art"

OR expands your search by allowing either term to be included in your results. You might use this to include similar words, synonyms or to search multiple topics.

Example: Feminism OR "Women's Lib"

NOT gives you results for the first search term, but eliminates any results that also contain the second.

Example: “Under a Blood Red Sky" NOT “U2"

(Parenthesis) allow you to nest pairs of terms so that the terms within the pairs are searched together first. Parenthetical searches using OR and one other Boolean term must use parenthesis. You can get a little nuts with this. Often simple is best.

Example: (Politics OR Feminism) AND “Faith Ringgold"

* [The asterisk] allows you to shorten words so you can search all forms at once.

Example: Feminis* instead of Feminist, Feminists, and Feminism

? [The question mark] lets you search words when you don't know, or don't want to specify, specific letters within a word. It's great for bad spellers, but also helps you include foreign spellings that are similar, but not the same.

Example: Theat?? Searches both “Theatre" and "Theater"