

Basic Search Concepts

Definitions adapted from *ODLIS*:
Online Dictionary of Library & Information Science
<http://lu.com/odlis/>

★ Keywords versus Controlled vocabulary

Keyword:

A significant word or phrase in the title, subject headings (descriptors), contents note, abstract, or text of a record in an online catalog or bibliographic database that can be used as a search term in a free-text search to retrieve all the records containing it.

Controlled vocabulary:

An established list of preferred terms from which a cataloger or indexer must select when assigning subject headings or descriptors in a bibliographic record, to indicate the content of the work in a library catalog, index, or bibliographic database

★ Truncation

The dropping of characters and the addition of a symbol at the end, beginning, or within a word in a keywords search to retrieve variant forms.

Example:

librar to retrieve records containing "interlibrary," "intralibrary," "librarian," "librarianship," "libraries," "library," etc.

In most online catalogs and bibliographic databases, the end truncation symbol is the * (asterisk), but since the truncation symbol is not standardized, other symbols may be used (?, \$, #, +).

As a general rule, it is unwise to truncate to fewer than four characters (*example:* art* retrieves "artist," "artistic," "artistry," and "artwork" but also "artichoke," "artillery," etc.).

★ Boolean logic

A system of logic developed by the English mathematician George Boole (1815-64) that allows the user to combine words or phrases representing significant concepts when searching an online catalog or bibliographic database by keywords. Three logical commands (sometimes called "operators") are available in most search software:

- The **OR** command is used to *expand* retrieval by including synonyms and related terms in the query.
- The **AND** command is used to *narrow* search results. Each time another concept is added using "and," the search becomes more specific.
- The **NOT** command is used to *exclude* unwanted records from search results.