Designing Effective Searches

- Boolean searching

Using connectors OR, AND, NOT between search terms can specify mandatory terms, alternate terms, terms to exclude, terms in specific parts of the document, terms appearing X times, or terms within a certain proximity of other terms. You can narrow your search to find your terms in the document title, full text, author, or subject terms.

- Wildcards, Truncation, Proximity Operators

Wildcard and truncation symbols can create searches where there are unknown characters, multiple spellings, or various endings. Neither symbol can be the first character in your search term.

The wildcard symbol is a question mark (?). Enter your search terms and replace any unknown character with a ? and EBSCO will find all citations of that word with the ? replaced by a letter.

For example, a search for ne?t will return hits containing neat, newt, nest, or next.
Truncation is represented by an asterisk (*). Enter the root of a search term and replace the ending with an *. EBSCO returns citations of all forms of that term.

For example, a search for `teach*` will return hits containing `teach, teaching` and `teacher/teachers`.

Proximity searches can be used to find two or more words that occur within a specified number of words (or fewer) of each other. Proximity searching is used with a keyword or Boolean search.
The proximity operators are a near operator or within operator (N or W) and a number (to specify the number of words). The proximity operator is placed between the words you’re searching.

For example, searching for tax N5 reform will find instances of these words occurring within 5 words of one another, regardless of the order in which they appear. This search will return results matching tax reform as well as reform of income tax.

Using a within operator (W) in the same search will find the words within the range you specify, in the order in which you enter them. A search for tax W8 reform will return results matching tax reform but NOT reform of income tax.

Notice in the images that the first two results are the same; however, the first search returned more results because the order of the search terms does not matter. The second search narrowed the results.
• **Grouping Terms Using Parenthesis**

Without parenthesis, a search is executed from left to right. Words enclosed in parenthesis are searched first, allowing you to control and define your search. The left phrase in parenthesis is searched first, then the second phrase is searched based on those results.

For example, a generalized search for **dog or cat and show or parade** will retrieve everything on dogs, *as well as* cat shows, *as well as* everything on parades, giving you far too many irrelevant results.

Searching (**dog or cat**) and (**show or parade**) will control the search to only find articles about shows or parades that reference dogs or cats.

• **Quotation Marks**

When a phrase is enclosed by double quotation marks, the exact phrase is searched. This can be especially helpful when searching for specific, common names; the use of quotation marks can narrow your search.