Searching with Operators

You can use ‘Operators’ to combine your search terms in creative ways. Let’s use the following research question to explore how operators work.

Operators tell the database how you’d like the words you’re searching to be found in relation to each other in your search results.

By default, whenever you run a search in Google, you’re using the “AND” operator on the keywords in your search. You just don’t see it.

This operator asks the search engine to return only results containing all keywords you entered. So, in the image, that’s where the two circles overlap.

The same thing happens when you do a search using one of the LRC’s research databases. The “AND” can be hidden, or you can include it. You get the same number of results either way.

Other operators can also be used.

For example, combine your keywords with an OR to search for one, or the other, or both terms.

Searching for both terms ensures that you don’t miss potentially relevant results that used different wording or related concepts.

Be Careful! This search isn’t set up properly yet. Right now, it will look for articles on Electric Cars AND Environmental Impact OR articles on Carbon emissions, but not necessarily articles on electric cars.

Fix the problem using brackets to package terms and operators into units to be interpreted together.

See the difference? The first search contains many more results because the search request allowed the database to retrieve articles with just the phrase “carbon emissions.”

The first search isn’t as helpful as the second, more targeted one. With the brackets placed correctly, we will retrieve articles containing Electric Cars and Environmental Impact OR articles containing Electric Cars and Carbon Emissions OR articles containing Electric Cars and both terms.

This strategy helps you expand your search to capture additional relevant results that use alternate wording.

Thanks for listening. Please explore our other Advanced Searching tutorials for more tips.