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Handout Video SLB 4a: Combining Search Terms

Combine your search terms correctly and you will find the information you are looking for quicker.

Let's say you would like to search for information about waste in Amsterdam. This means you would like your search results to be about both waste and Amsterdam.

In Google and most databases, you can simply put an interspace between the two search terms. This interspace equals the use of AND, meaning that both terms must appear in your search results.
By searching only using waste, in the database Narcis, you get 5452 search results.

Would you also like to get search results in which garbage is used as well as waste? In that case, put OR in capitals between waste and garbage: *Waste OR garbage.*
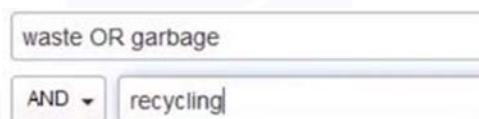Using OR means that these terms may both appear in your search results or separately, either would be fine. As you can see, you now get more search results: 5690.

You can also use AND and OR simultaneously. With many databases, this is how a search query would look: *(waste OR garbage) Amsterdam*

You do not need the brackets when using Google. Your search query will then look like this:
waste OR garbage Amsterdam

Many databases offer advanced search options. You will then have a number of little search boxes on your screen which you can combine with AND and OR.

Type the synonyms of one element of your question, the OR combination, in one search box. Then, type those of a second element of your question in the next search box. Finally, use AND to combine both search boxes and the respective search terms:

In case you are using search terms which have multiple meanings, it can be useful to use NOT.
For example, if you would like to find information about the island of Java, you will not wish to get any search results about the programming language Java. You can exclude these search results by typing in *Java NOT software*.

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Another useful way of indicating more precisely what you are looking for is using double quotation marks.

Your search term will sometimes consist of more than one word, such as *waste disposal*.

If you type in *waste disposal* this way, you will see that these search terms will show up separately in your search results. However, you wish to see these two search terms occur as one search term. How do you manage this?

You put double quotation marks around your search terms: *"waste disposal"*

The search terms are now seen as one and you will only get search results with *waste disposal* as a compound noun. This is possible in most databases and in Google. Fewer search results will remain but these will be much more relevant.

Sometimes, you will wish to search using search terms which start with the same word stem.

For example, you are using the search term recycling, but you may also want to find results with the terms recycle, recyclable or recycled.

Rather than typing in all of these search terms and combining them with OR, you can use truncation in many databases. In this case, type in recycle, without an e, and follow it with a truncation symbol - often an asterisk (*):

Recycl*

Now you will find all articles containing terms which start with recycl.

So, there are many ways to combine your search terms. In most cases, you will need to try out various search methods. This will show more results but will eventually lead to an end-result that is as complete as possible.

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