Using a database or catalog to find material is straightforward. All you need to do is combine Boolean Operators with key terms to create a search string. Below are examples of how to do this.

**Example Search String**

```
AND
  children  AND  ( e-learning  OR  computers )  NOT  television
```

Boolean Operators can expand results or limit them. They must be all caps to work correctly.

- **AND** limits your results to only material that use both children AND e-learning.
- **OR** expands your results to any material that use either e-learning OR computers.
- **NOT** eliminates very powerfully. It is used the least often because it is almost too powerful, especially in full-text searching databases.
Choosing key terms can be difficult if you are new to a topic. There are many ways to brainstorm key terms, but the following thought exercise is highly recommended.

I am researching ___________________ because I want to find out ___________________ to better understand ___________________.

choose 1 to help map this statement to a thesis statement later.

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**Example Search String**

elect* AND California AND ( solar* OR sustainability OR environment )

The **asterisk** * captures all various endings for the root. For example, when you add an asterisk to the end of "elect" like elect* you are capturing: elect, elects, elected, election, electoral

The ( **parentheses** ) should be used to contain all of the synonyms. You can add as many synonyms as needed, just make sure to put the upper case OR in between the words.

**Example Search String**

wom?n AND ( office OR "work place" OR occupation ) AND discrimin*

The **question mark** ? is used for one letter differences in a word, like women or woman

The " **quotation marks** " are for phrases larger than one word, it indicates the order you have put the words in matters.

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**Choosing key terms can be difficult** if you are new to a topic. There are many ways to brainstorm key terms, but the following thought exercise is highly recommended.
Your search string may look different depending on what tool you are using for research.

**CLIO**, our Columbia University Libraries Catalog, has a simple search bar. Add Boolean Operators.

```
children AND (e-learning OR computers) NOT television
```

Don't forget you can find database recommendations in research guides for each discipline:

https://library.columbia.edu/services/subject-guides.html

**ProQuest**, an interdisciplinary database, has boxes for Boolean Operators in advanced search.

**EBSCO**, an interdisciplinary database, has boxes for the Boolean Operators built in.

**JSTOR**, a humanities focused database, has a simple search bar. Add Boolean Operators all caps.