

TERMS & CONNECTORS

Terms and connectors searching allows you to enter key terms describing your issue and use connectors to specify the relationship between the words. In choosing your terms, be sure to consider synonyms and antonyms. Start with a simple search that expresses no more than two or three concepts in close proximity, preferably in the same paragraph or sentence. When you review search results, pay attention to language used in cases that are relevant. Also examine irrelevant hits to determine if you can eliminate them from your search by refining your strategy.

TERMS: HOW WESTLAWNEXT READS THE WORDS IN YOUR SEARCH

Singular or Plural? WestSearch automatically retrieves the plural form of a word if you enter the singular form. It also retrieves regular and irregular verbs. If you enter the plural of a term only the plural is retrieved, hence it is always a good idea to use only the singular. If you want to turn off the pluralizer and retrieve only the singular place the # in front of the word. For example, #state.

Possessives. WestSearch automatically retrieves the possessive form if you enter the non-possessive form of a term. If you enter the possessive form of the term only the possessive is retrieved.

Compound Words. A compound word may appear various ways: hyphenated, as one word or as two words. To retrieve all variations use the hyphenated form.

Acronyms. Like compound words, acronyms appear various ways. To retrieve all variations of an acronym enter it with periods and without spaces, e.g. E.P.A.

Stop Words. Some words, such as with or about are too common to be searched. To require a search to include a stop word, place the # sign in front of the word, e.g. #about. Stop words are also known as noise words or common words.

Phrases. Use quotation marks to search for a phrase, for example, “summary judgment.” Use phrases in your search when you are absolutely certain the phrase will not be expressed any other way.

Root Expander (!). The root expander helps you search for a word which may have several different endings depending on whether or not the concept is expressed as a verb, noun, adjective, adverb, or in one of several verb tenses. For example, *constitution!* retrieves *constitution*, *constitutional*, and *constitutionality*. Be sure to truncate the word at its root and not before. A common error is to use the root expander without considering all of the variations that may be generated. For example, *constitu!* retrieves *constituency*, *constituent*, and *constitute*, as well as variations of *constitution*.

Universal Character (*). The universal character, or “wild card,” represents one variable character. It can be useful in the middle of a word or at its end, but not at the beginning. For instance, *dr*nk* will retrieve *drink*, *drinks*, *drank*, and *drunk*. When you place asterisks at the end of a term they specify the maximum length of that term. For example, *host**** will retrieve *hostess* and *hosting*. There is no limit to the number of asterisks you can use within a term, but the places held by the asterisk must contain a character. For example, *person**l* will retrieve *personnel* but not *personal*.

Hyphen (-). A double hyphenation converts the word in the middle into a wildcard. For example, *dismissed-with-prejudice*, will return *dismissed with prejudice* and *dismissed without prejudice*.

CONNECTORS: HOW TO SPECIFY PROXIMITY IN YOUR SEARCH

Since sentences and paragraphs are distinct units of thought, it is generally best to use *grammatical* connectors. If you are retrieving documents in your search results that are irrelevant because the terms are not close enough in proximity to one another then change from grammatical connectors to *numerical* connectors. And if you are retrieving documents that are not relevant because the words need to be in a certain order in addition to being in a certain proximity, use grammatical or numerical that begin with the plus sign (+) rather than the forward slash (?). Use Boolean connectors (*and*, *or*, and *but not*) to define what concepts should be included/excluded in your search results.

Relational

- /p within same paragraph
- +p within same paragraph with the term on the left of the +p preceding the term on the right
- /s within the same sentence
- +s within same sentence with the term on the left of the +p preceding the term on the right

Numerical

Numerical connectors require words to be within a specified number of terms from each other. When numerical connectors are preceded with a slash the word can appear in any order. For example, *breath /5 test* will retrieve the following phrases: “the state admitted evidence of his *breath test*” and “*test* results showed that Wiggins’ *breath* contained .070 grams”. When numerical connectors are preceded by a + then the term to the left of the number must precede the term to the right. For example, *capital +3 gain* requires that *capital* precede *gain* by three terms or less.

Boolean

Use the **OR** connector, represented by a space, to search for alternative terms, for example, *attorney lawyer counsel*.

When you use a one-word synonym for a multi-word expression that you don’t want to search for as a phrase, use the *parenthesis* to create a space between the single term and the expression. For example, to search for *intoximeter* as a synonym for *breath /3 test*, you would ask for *intoximeter (breath /3 test)*. To search for cases that discuss discrimination against a blind visually handicapped or impaired individual, you would ask for *discriminat! /s (visual! /3 handicap! Impair!) blind!*.

The **AND** connector (**&**) retrieves documents containing two or more search terms anywhere in the document.

You can exclude documents containing certain terms from your search using the **BUT NOT** (**%**) connector. Use this option with caution. If, for instance, you wanted medical malpractice cases for psychiatrists only, and used the BUT NOT connector to exclude documents with the words physician and surgeon, you could easily exclude relevant psychiatric malpractice cases that mentioned physicians and surgeons in the opinion. Useful applications of the BUT NOT connector are to exclude prior search results to avoid duplication and to exclude specific topics and key numbers from your search. For example, *malpractice /p surgeon physician doctor /p diagnos! treat! % 299k18*