Every online database, whether it is a library catalog, a database like Academic Search Elite, or a web search tool like Google, allows you to do keyword searching. Doing a keyword search does not guarantee that you will find relevant articles about your topic, it only guarantees that the words you enter for your keyword search appear somewhere in each of the articles retrieved—they could appear several times, or just once in the last paragraph. When constructing a keyword search, do not type in your research question or entire thesis statement. The more words you enter in a search, the fewer results you will get. Instead, identify the main concepts or “key” words of your topic and enter those essential terms in your search. When examining a search result that looks promising, pay attention to the subject headings assigned for use in a revised search.

**Truncation & Phrase Searching:** Use the truncation symbol to create searches where you want to retrieve all variants of a word stem. The most commonly used truncation symbol is the asterisk (*). For example, a search for educat* will retrieve: educate, educating, education, educational, educator, educators, etc.

Enclose commonly used phrases in quotation marks for “phrase searching” -- Example: "eating disorders" will retrieve results where the phrase eating disorders appears. The search makes the words "stick together."

**Boolean operators** (AND, OR, NOT) allow you to combine words or phrases in order to narrow or broaden your results when searching an online database.

Using AND to separate terms or phrases will narrow your search giving you only results that contain both of the words you entered (shaded area below). Remember, you will miss those articles that only mention anorexia or bulimia.

Using OR to separate terms or phrases—best used for synonyms or related terms—will broaden your search, giving you articles with either of the search terms you entered (shaded area below).

Using NOT* to separate terms will also limit your search. This is especially useful when you get results that are unconnected to your topic but that are commonly used in relation to one or more of your search terms. If you were writing a paper only about anorexia, and not about any other eating disorder, using NOT would eliminate any article that mentions bulimia. There is a down side to this, in that you will miss some articles that mention anorexia in addition to bulimia.

**Nesting**
If you use more than one Boolean Operator in the same search statement, you will need to group your keywords with parentheses to let the database know how you want the words combined. This is called nesting.

**HELP** or **SEARCH TIPS** provided in each database to find out the Boolean operators and rules specific to that database.