Basic Skills for Using Research Databases, including EZRA, the Thomas Library Catalog*

*Also useful on such Web search engines as Google and Yahoo.

Keyword Searches

Keyword searches--or WORD searches--will look for selected words in title and other designated fields. In some databases the full text of articles may also be searched.

Boolean operators: **AND** and **OR** and **NOT** are used in keyword searches to specify how you want specific words to be related to one another. If you type **AND** between two or more words, **all** those words must be present in the records retrieved, though not necessarily next to each other. If you want at least one of two or more words, type **OR** between them. Use **NOT** to retrieve records **without** a particular word.


```
AND   ◯◯        OR   ⬤⬤        NOT   ⬤◯
 human and anatomy    attorney or lawyer    disarmament not nuclear
```
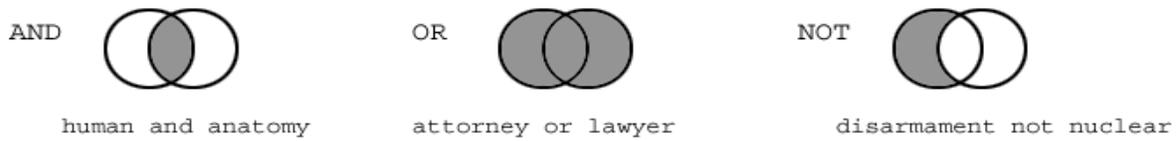
Short Story, Play, and Song Titles in EZRA: Since KEYWORD searches in EZRA automatically search contents notes, you can often identify anthologies or recordings that contain the title you type, for example:

Telltale Heart   *it is no desert*   *Wind Beneath My Wings*

Adjacency: If you type words in a KEYWORD search box without using Boolean operators, most systems will search for them as a phrase. For example, the search *sustainable economy* in EZRA yields five titles, all with the phrase *sustainable economy* somewhere in the title or contents notes. However, if you do a WORD search for *sustainable* **AND** *economy*, EZRA gives you 61 results with the two words anywhere and in any order in the title or contents notes.

Note: EZRA and many other online systems process AND before OR. Typing *England and queen or king* would find material on the Queen of England but also items about <u>any</u> king. The statement *England and queen or England and king* would be a better way of finding items on English royalty.

Subject Heading Searches

Unlike KEYWORD searches, SUBJECT searches are very precise, using a controlled vocabulary. A controlled vocabulary is a set list of words that an index uses to describe a book or article. EZRA, for example, uses the Library of Congress subject headings, and many other databases also have their own controlled vocabularies. A good way to find useful subject headings is to start with a WORD search and then check the subject headings on an item you find. You can then click on the appropriate subject heading to find items on the same subject.

For instance, if you were interested in how people interact with the Internet, you might find the book, <u>The Psychology of the Internet</u>. At the bottom of the record are three subject headings:

        Communication—Psychological aspects
        Internet (Computer network)—Psychological aspects
        Computer networks—psychological aspects

You could then use those subject headings to find other books with related information.

Truncation

Truncation is a means of retrieving various forms—including the plural—of a word stem. For instance, in EZRA, you can truncate with an * in KEYWORD searches.

For instance, histor*
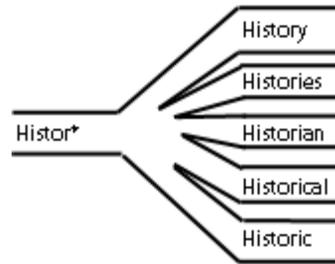
Other kinds of searches in EZRA automatically truncate:
       Title search: *black* retrieves black, blacks, blackberry
       Author search: *Cole* retrieves Cole, Coleman, Coleridge
       Subject search: *sports* retrieves sports, sports medicine,
            sportscasters, etc.

Note: Different databases use different symbols for truncation. A few examples are:

DATABASE	TRUNCATION SYMBOL
EZRA	*
Academic Search Complete and other EBSCO databases	*
Wilson Indexes (Wilson Web)	*
OhioLINK databases – incl. *Education* *Abstracts* and many more	* *or* $
Lexis-Nexis	* *or* !
JSTOR	*

When in doubt as to which symbol to use, you can check the database help screens or ask a reference librarian.

Modifying Your Search

In EZRA and in the OhioLINK Central Catalog, you can do a broad keyword search and then focus the results by using the Modify Search button, located at both the top and bottom of the screen. You will then be able to specify LANGUAGE, MATERIAL TYPE, WHERE ITEM IS LOCATED, and more. In many article databases, such as Academic Search Premier and Education Abstracts, the basic search form enables you to specify such factors as language, time period, article type, and other factors specific to the database you are using.

For instance, suppose you did a KEYWORD search in EZRA on "ecology" and found several hundred records. With modifying capabilities, you could say that you want "tree" or "forest" to be in the title or contents notes AND you want to see only items that are in the Science Library.   Thus you are able to tailor a search to your particular needs.

✳ If you have questions as you do your research, ask a reference librarian. ✳