Introduction to Boolean Searching

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The purpose of this presentation is to introduce you to Boolean searching.
- Boolean searching is also known as terms and connectors searching.
- Boolean searching based on mathematical theory.
- Most online databases and internet search engines support Boolean searches. The terminology varies.

Advantages of Boolean Searching:
- You pick the terms and control the results
- Results are more precise and relevant
- Complete search results
- Cost effective

Disadvantages of Boolean Searching:
- You need to know terms relating to your topic
- Your ability determines your search success
- Difficult to search for broad legal issues
Boolean Search Techniques

- First, you should analyze your legal issues or problem.
- What is the jurisdiction?
- What area(s) of law?
- What do you need to find?
  - Background, overview
  - Statutes
  - Rules
  - Regulations
  - Case law
  - Analysis, practice tips

Boolean Search Techniques

- After you have analyzed and defined your issue(s), identify a database to search that will contain the information you need.
  - Look at the coverage and scope of the database. What type of documents are contained in the database and years are covered?
  - Pick subject or jurisdiction specific databases.

Boolean Search Techniques

- After you have analyzed your issue(s) and picked a database to search, you should formulate a search query accordingly.
  - Generate Synonyms, use a thesaurus if available.
- The art of searching lies in understanding how your issue is likely to be expressed in the documents contained in the database.
Boolean Search Techniques

- The next few slides will show you a variety of operators you can use to form a Boolean search including:
  - Quotation marks
  - Basic connectors
  - Wildcard symbols
  - Numeric connectors
  - Grammatical connectors
  - Parentheses

Boolean Search Techniques

- Quotation marks in most databases limit your search result to those documents which contain the specific phrase.
  - "living will"
  - "limited liability"

Boolean Search Techniques

- Basic connectors
  - AND to narrow the search to retrieve records containing all of the words it separates.
  - OR to broaden the search to retrieve records that contain any of the words it separates.
  - NOT to narrow the search to retrieve records that do not contain the term following it.
Boolean Search Techniques

- **Wildcard symbols**
  - Use with a root for any ending
    - Bank* for banking, banker, bankruptcy
  - * use in place of a single letter
    - Anders*n or dr*nk

Boolean Search Techniques

- The singular form of a word automatically retrieves the plural and the possessive. BUT the plural or the possessive DOES NOT retrieve the singular.
- Watch out for hyphens and acronyms. Databases treat these differently.

Boolean Search Techniques

- **Numeric connectors**
  - Restricts search results to those containing your terms within a certain number of words.
    - Limited /10 liability

- **Grammatical connectors**
  - Restricts search results to those containing your terms within a certain grammatical unit, a sentence or paragraph.
    - Limited /s liability
    - Limited /p liability
Boolean Search Techniques

- Parentheses group like words or phrases together.
  - Words in parentheses are processed first and treated as a unit.
  - In other words (defect /s design/) or “product liability” is telling the database to retrieve any extension of defect within the same sentence as any extension of design OR “product liability”

Boolean Search Techniques

- Consider using fields or segments.
  - Use a date field or segment to restrict your search results after a date, before a date, between two dates, or on a specific date.
  - Most documents in databases are separated into sections of text. The types of fields or segments depend on the document.
    - Search for cases a specific judge heard using the JUDGE field or segment.

Boolean Search Techniques

- Once you get a list of results, most databases allow you to narrow the results further or search within the results.
  - Lexis - Focus
  - Westlaw - Locate
Boolean Search Techniques

- Tips
  - If your search query is too complicated you may not get enough results.
  - If your search is not complicated enough you may get too many results.
  - Practice, practice, practice!

Questions?
Please ask us – We're here to help

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