TERMNOLOGY FOR DATABASE SEARCHING

Database Basics:

Index
1) an alphabetical list of topics, names, etc.; often used in a book to show the page where the item occurs.
2) a tool for finding the location of periodical articles on a specific topic.

Citation – the collection of elements that identify an information source. Some or all of the following should be included: author/editor, title (article or book), publication (journal, etc.), publishing source, publishing location (this may be a URL), date of publication.

Abstract/Annotation – a summary of the content of a resource (article, book, Web site, etc.)

Periodical Database – an electronic index to articles in periodicals. This may give only citations/abstracts to the articles or may also give the full text of the article.

NOTE: the full text of an article from a periodical database, even though obtained online, is not the same thing as an online article/page.

Searching Basics:

Boolean – a mathematical logic that is used to match search terms and produce a designated result. The most frequently used terms are: AND, OR, AND NOT.

Examples: (results are shaded)

AND – produces results containing each designated term. This limits and focuses a search.

Hawaii AND pollution

OR – produces results containing at least one of the designated terms. This broadens a search.

women OR females

NOT – removes all results containing the AND NOT term. This limits a search. WARNING: this can also remove some desirable results.

promotion AND NOT advertising
Help – instructions on how to use the database, explaining the unique ways this database works. Different databases may use different methods to do the same procedure (e.g. truncation). This is not always labeled “help.”

Keyword – the topic word. This is often used as a free-form search method, as opposed to searching by a designated field, like a subject heading.

Limiters – special designated fields that allow further limiting of search results. These will often be dates and/or results format (e.g. full-text only), but watch for others. The term “peer reviewed” may be the limiter for search results from only scholarly journal articles.

Proximity – a method used in searching to designate how close one word is to another word (e.g. within three words). Sometimes this method replaces a Boolean AND search.

Result Screen – The information retrieved from the database in response to the terms searched. Search results can be citations, abstracts, or full text.

Search History – A list of all results from searches executed during the current search session. In some databases these previous histories can be combined for a new search. One advanced search technique is to do separate searches for established subject headings and then from the search history screen to combine these previous search results with AND.

Search Method – the software interface that creates a search. This may be a simple single keyword or complex, multi-item combinations. Each database will have its own unique title for its search method(s). The complex method usually gives more options for refining a search.

Stop Words – Commonly used words such as articles, pronouns, and prepositions. Stop words are not searchable in a database.

Subject Heading – the designated word or word-form that a database uses to describe a topic. Example: PORPOISES instead of DOLPHINS. This is also called “controlled vocabulary,” and some databases will include a Thesaurus of these terms.

Truncation– a means of using the root or base form of a word to find the variations on that word. Example: advertis? → advertisement, advertising. This gives more possible results when you don’t know what form of the word will be used in a topic search. WARNING: the symbol to mark a truncation is different for each database.

Wildcard – A way to find words with unknown characters or different spellings. The unknown letter is replaced with a symbol. Example: ne?t.