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Advanced Keyword Searching

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On December 4, 2000 the University Libraries replaced the Libraries catalog's keyword search with a new Advanced Keyword Search (AKS). This keyword index includes all words in the author, title and subject sections of the numerous on-line catalog records, as well as information from selected notes. These notes contain information pertaining to contents, summaries of materials and the source of acquisition. Summary notes are provided for items in the curriculum section, usually children's materials. Content notes are usually found in records for anthologies. Notes for the source of acquisition pertain to items in Archives/special collections. These notes contain information about where and from whom the University Libraries acquired special materials.

You may be asking, how is Advanced Keyword searching different from the word search that the Libraries catalog had prior to December 2000? Well, the major difference is the default search. Other differences involve limiting, Boolean operators, proximity operators, truncation, and sorting.

The old keyword search automatically put an 'and' between words, resulting in many hits per search. If the words occurred anywhere in the record, that record was retrieved. With the New Advanced Keyword searching, the default search looks for the exact phrase entered. This is also called an adjacency search. One of the biggest advantages to this type of search is a reduction in the 'noise to hit' ratio. More of the records retrieved will be specific to what the user asked for. The old default search resulted in a greater 'noise to hit' ratio, where some, even many of the records retrieved were not what the user was looking for.

With the old key word search, the user would conduct the initial search, then limit the search results by language, date, location, etc. With the new AKS, the user can limit an initial search at the time it is executed. Limits include language, material type, bib level, publisher, location and date.

Boolean operators such as AND, OR, and AND NOT, can broaden or narrow an Advanced Keyword. It is not necessary to type the operator in caps while searching. AND (or the character &) narrows the search by specifying that two or more search terms must be present within the record. OR looks for records containing any of the search terms. AND NOT specifies a search that does not contain a certain term. It is very important to use AND NOT. The system will not recognize NOT, so using NOT instead of AND NOT will result in no entries found.

Proximity operators specify how close search terms must be to each other. The operator term NEAR looks for the search words or phrases within 10 words of each other. To specify that the words must be closer to each other, the user can specify the distance by using the operator WITHIN followed by the number of words. For example, "Colorado within 4 wildflowers" retrieves records with the phrases "Colorado wildflowers" but not "Wildflowers in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado."

There are three truncation symbols, or wildcards, for truncation: the asterisk (*), the double asterisk (**), and the question mark (?). The asterisk can be used as a wildcard for 1-5 characters. However, if there are 6 or more trailing characters, a search should be truncated with a double asterisk (**). The question mark (?) wildcard represents only one letter after having used at least three characters. For example, wom?n would retrieve records concerning either women or woman.

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The final difference in the new AKS is the ability to sort records by date, title or relevance. The default sorting is alphabetically by title. Sorting by date is another option. Relevance sorting is a new concept in which those records with the keyword(s) in the first 8 words indexed for the records are listed first, followed by less relevant records.

The University Libraries are pleased to provide this improved method of searching the Libraries catalog to faculty, staff, students and other users. We hope that Advanced Keyword Searching will be considered a useful research tool. To explore the new advanced keyword searching option, visit the University Libraries web page at http://iris.unl.edu and select UNL Catalog.