

# INFORMATION SOURCES

## PROXIMITY SEARCHING AND GOOGLE SEARCHING HINTS

Compiled by Evangel University Library Staff  
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If you do online searching, the following information on **Proximity Searching** may save hours of time and lots of frustration.

Why use Proximity Searching?

Many times researchers have two concepts or words which appear to be related and should be found close together in journal articles or documents on the Internet. To limit a search to only those articles or documents, researchers need to use Proximity Searching.

1. If the **ProQuest Full Text Journal** databases are being used, the researcher should go to Advanced Search and then click on the drop down list of Boolean terms. Especially note the ones, Near/3 and Pre/1, because these are useful for Proximity Searches. **Near/3** is used when two words should be found within 3 words of each other but you do not care which one is first. **Pre/1** is used when the two words should be adjacent to each other and in the order given.  
When another spacing is needed within Advanced Search, *ProQuest Help* gives this information (this asks the user to click the drop-down menu under Citation and Abstract **to locate "Citation and Document Text"**).  
**W/#** Use to find documents where the words are within some number of words apart (either before or after). Use when searching for keywords within "Citation and Document Text" or "Document Text." *Example*: computer W/3 careers.  
**W/PARA** This finds documents where these words are within the same paragraph (within approx. 1000 characters). Use when searching for keywords within "Document Text." *Example*: internet W/PARA education.  
**W/DOC** Use to find documents where all the words appear within the document text. Use W/DOC in place of AND when searching keywords within "Citation and Document Text" or "Document Text" to retrieve more comprehensive results. *Example*: Internet W/DOC Education  
**NOT W/#** Use to find documents where these words appear but are not within some number of words apart (either before or after). Use when searching for keywords within "Citation and Document Text" or "Document Text." *Example*: computer NOT W/2 careers.  
**PRE/#** Use to find documents where the first word appears some number of words before the second word. Use when searching for keywords within "Citation and Document Text" or "Document Text." *Example*: world pre/3 web.
2. If **Academic OneFile, General OneFile, InfoTrac, etc. (Gale Cengage Learning)** databases are being used, the Help screens say:  
**Proximity Operators**  
Proximity operators are used between two search terms to indicate that the terms must occur in a record within a specified distance of each other for that record to match. Words that are close to each other are more likely to be related than words that are far apart. A proximity operator has two components:  
a) A **letter** that indicates the *direction*  
b) A **number** that indicates the *distance* in words  
There are two proximity operators:  
**Wn** The **W** (within) operator specifies that the word that follows the operator must occur within **n** words *after* the word that precedes the operator for a record to match. For example, the search expression **shared w3 values** matches any

records in which the word *values* occurs three or fewer words after the word *shared*.

**Nn** The **N** (near) operator specifies that the words on either side of the operator must occur within *n* words of each other in *either direction* for a record to match. For example, the search string **memory n5 repressed** matches any records in which the words *memory* and *repressed* occur within five or fewer words of each other in either direction.

You can use proximity operators only when searching indexes made up of individual words, such as a title index. They are most useful in indexes of large areas of text, such as keyword and full-text indexes.

Note that proximity operators can be used only between two words, not between a word and an expression within nesting operators (parentheses):

Invalid expression: **fleas n10 (dogs or cats)**

Valid alternative: **fleas n10 dogs or fleas n10 cats**

3. For searches using **EBSCO** databases, you can use a *proximity search* to search for two or more words that occur within a specified number of words (or fewer) of each other in the databases. Proximity searching is used with a Keyword or Boolean search. The proximity operators are composed of a letter (**N** or **W**) and a **number** (to specify the number of words). The proximity operator is placed between the words that are to be searched, as follows:
  - Near Operator (N)** - **N5** finds the words if they are within *five words* of one another regardless of the order in which they appear. [**Any number from 1-20 may be used.**] For example, type **tax N5 reform** to find results that would match *tax reform* as well as *reform of income tax*.
  - Within Operator (W)** - In the following example, **W8** finds the words if they are within *eight words* of one another and *in the order in which you entered them*. [**Any number from 1-20 may be used.**] For example, type **tax W8 reform** to find results that would match *tax reform* but would **not** match *reform of income tax*.

**Note:** These operators will not work when parentheses are used to separate search terms. For example: **(tax or tariff) N5 reform** will not find results. You must use **(tax N5 reform)** or **(tariff N5 reform)**.
4. If the **Literature Resource Center** database is being used, the researcher should click Search Hints and scan down to Search Operators (Proximity Searching) for instructions.
5. Those searching **NetLibrary** for full text virtual books may use NEAR between a two word search. This provides results where the two words are in the same sentence. The search engine defaults the NEAR Boolean function to 5 as in NEAR5 and searches for the combination within 5 words forward and backward. The user can change the number of words they want to specify for the NEAR functionality as in NEAR20.
6. Those searching **CREDO Reference** for information in reference books should use the Advanced Search and choose "With the exact phrase" if there are sequential words, i.e., personal names, events (ex.: Civil War), etc.
7. **Google's Help Screen** suggests for Proximity or Wildcard searches: use an asterisk (\*) to locate two words close together: i.e., red \* blue will locate documents with the words separated by only one or two words. Additional asterisks may be added if needed for possible intervening words.
8. The **Exalead search engine** [www.exalead.com](http://www.exalead.com) **may also be used**. Enter NEAR between two terms to find them within 16 words of each other. (Randolph Hock. *Extreme Searchers Internet Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2007, p.128)

## 9. Google Special Search Syntaxes (for additional help see [www.GoogleGuide.com](http://www.GoogleGuide.com)).

(Here are examples of a specific search syntax combined with a sample topic.)

site:art.com This finds resources from a specific Web site [**do not leave spaces** between the colon and anything following it here **or in any of the following forms**]

intitle:"Stanton MacDonald Wright" This finds major words or phrases used in web page titles (use **quotation marks** to search for the phrase as a whole).

+site:edu This limits the search to only sites with edu in their URLs (usually a college or university Web site in the U.S.); use +site:ac for colleges or universities outside the U.S.

The plus (+) says the search term **must be in the document** retrieved or its address.

inurl:library find word(s) just in Web site URL

intext: find words in the text

inanchor: find a specific Web page, e.g., inanchor:CNBC would find [www.cnbc.com](http://www.cnbc.com)

link: find pages that link to the specified page, e.g., link:http://www.mit.edu

cache: provides a copy of a page from the last time Google indexed it

related: find pages related to the URL entered – works better with site indexed

stocks: e.g., stocks:amzn -- uses the stock symbol to find a specific offering

[Below are **additional tips** from the more complete Google Help: Cheat Sheet

[www.google.com/intl/en/help/cheatsheet.html](http://www.google.com/intl/en/help/cheatsheet.html)]

Date: Search only a range of months: Olympics date:3 (search for Olympics references within past 3 months; 6 and 12-month date-restrict options also available)

info: Info about a page info:www.stanford.edu (find information about the Stanford University website)

[#]..[#] Search within a range of numbers DVD player \$100..150 (search for DVD players between \$100 and \$150); 2004..2006 would locate sites with dates from 2004 through 2006.

safesearch: Exclude adult-content: safesearch:sex education (search for sex education material without returning adult sites)

~ Search for word and its synonyms: ~auto (this will find the word auto and its synonyms: truck, car, etc.)

define: Locate definitions of a word: define:computer (will find definitions on the Internet)

Example of two or more **special syntaxes combined in one search**:

intitle:hydrocephalus site:edu This finds the word, hydrocephalus, in the title of the Web pages only in education Web sites. (**Other domain markers** besides .edu are .gov., .mil., .com, etc. (see **NORID below for all domain markers**). Please remember you can limit the search to sites in a specific country, i.e., .au (Australia), .ca (Canada). For all the country domain markers go to **Norid: Domain Name Registries Around the World** <http://www.norid.no/domenenavnbasert/domreg.html>. It contains **Generic top level domains (gTLD)** and **Country code top level domains (ccTLD)**)

**Cheat Sheets for other major search engines:**

<http://websearch.about.com/library/blbingsearch.htm>

Need help **Choosing a Search Engine?** Use:

Phil Bradley's Finding Information: Search Engines <http://www.philb.com/whichengine.htm>

NoodleTools: Choose the Best <http://www.noodletools.com/>

Find **Books online?** Use:

Internet Archive [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) Limit to Text Search

Google Books <http://books.google.com/bkshp?hl=en&tab=wp>

OAlster <http://www.oalster.org>, a collection of other sources.