Tips and tricks for advanced searches

Searching for online information is easy. Finding a manageable number of good-quality, relevant results can be more difficult. Use the 'tips' and 'tricks' below to help plan and refine your searches to ensure that you get the best results.

Start by thinking about the topic of your research, identifying search terms (keywords), and similar words (synonyms). In the following example, the topic of the search is "space".

Keyword	Universe
Synonyms	Outer space, deep space, cosmos, celestial space
Related words	Solar systems, galaxies, telescope, Shuttle, star, nebula, observatory, stratosphere
Acronyms	NASA = National Aeronautics and Space Administration ISS = International Space Station
Abbreviations	temp (temperature), ly (light-year)
Variant spellings (e.g. UK vs. US)	Defence/defense, astronaut/cosmonaut
Vernacular expressions	Higgs boson or Higgs particle is colloquially called the "*God particle*"
Hyphens	extra terrestrial, extra-terrestrial
Capitals	Big bang, Big Bang

You now have a wide selection of words to use in your online searches.

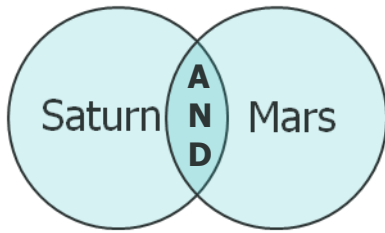## Use the following techniques to help you find stellar results:

To search for a phrase
Enclose a phrase within double quotations marks ("") in order to search for that exact phrase.
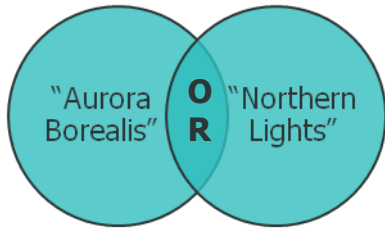
"Milky Way"
"Big Bang"

To connect search terms using AND, OR, NOT
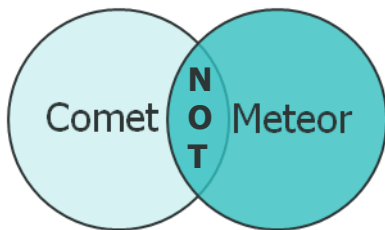(NB as a general convention type connector words in upper case)

Saturn AND Mars
Returns results where *both* of your search terms appear.
Use AND to narrow your search.

"Aurora Borealis" OR "Northern Lights"
Return your results where *either* of your search terms appear.
Use OR to broaden your search for alternative terms.

Comet NOT Meteor
Exclude a word or phrase from your search.

Using brackets
To separate search commands into a logical sequence, use brackets around the words or phrases you have connected with OR.

Universe AND (origin OR beginning OR creation)

Using an asterisk (truncation)
To retrieve variations of the ending of a word.

planet*
will find planet, planets, planetary

Using a question mark (wildcard)
To retrieve variations of spellings of a word by replacing one letter with a wildcard, which finds any letter in that position.

organi?ation
will find both organi**s**ation (English) and organi**z**ation (US)

These tips and tricks work for many online search tools, including Discover.
Some databases have even more specialised searching tools. You can find out more about them in the Help section of each database.

Here are some examples:
EMBASE: OvidSP Online Training
JSTOR: JSTOR Advanced Search Tips
LexisLibrary: Developing a search
MEDLINE: Searching
ScienceDirect: Perform an Advanced book/journal search
Westlaw: Terms and connectors used on Westlaw UK