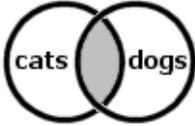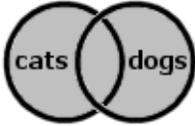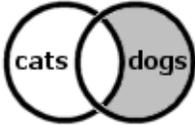# COMMON BOOLEAN SEARCH COMMANDS

Many databases use these common commands as the required syntax for inputting keywords. However, always check the "help" screen in case of variations.

Search intention	"Boolean" Operators (NB as a rule of thumb, type operators in upper-case letters)	
To look for one word and another word in your results	cats **AND** dogs	
To look for either one word or another (or both)	cats **OR** dogs	
To exclude a word from a search	dogs **NOT** cats	
To search for a phrase (use quotation marks)	**"black death"**	These words must appear next to each other in this sequence
To retrieve variations of a word (truncation)	econom*****	Will find: economic, economics, economical, economist etc.
To retrieve variations of a word by replacing one letter with a "wildcard"	organi**?**ation	Will find: organisation (English), and organization (US) **NB** – not available on all databases
To separate search commands into a logical sequence, use parentheses	**(**dogs **OR** cats**) AND** pigeons	
To search for both upper and lower case letters	Use lower case	

	Internet Search Engine Equivalents Use these if searching Altavista, Excite, Yahoo etc. (NB – Not Google)
To look for one word and another word in your results	**+**cats **+**dogs
To look for either one word or another (or both)	cats dogs
To exclude a word from a search	**+**dogs **-**cats

TIPS – COME UP WITH A SEARCH STRATEGY

Use some scrap paper, and take the time to jot down what you are looking for. A bit of thought in advance will save you more effort in the long run, particularly if your literature search is likely to be complicated and involved.

Identify keywords and phrases that describe your topic

Start with your essay question or project title. Break it into the main concepts, and try to identify relevant keywords or phrases that describe what you need to look for. If the project is a large one, you may have to do this process for each stage of your research. Consider whether alternative synonyms or terminology could be used in place of your keywords. E.g.

Qu. **Social comparison processes seem to infiltrate many group and intergroup phenomena. Why is this and how may they be exploited for practical ends in the work-place?**

Keywords:

"social comparison processes"	group **AND** phenomen* intergroup **AND** phenomen*	work **AND** place work-place employment

Start with the most relevant database for your subject area

Always begin your search with the most relevant resource for the subject area. Search it *thoroughly* before moving onto another database.

Begin with a "narrow" search

Try and get straight to the results that you want:
    Search using the most obvious keywords or phrases to describe your subject
    If the database has a thesaurus, use that to help you pick more specific terms for your search
    Make correct use of Boolean operators (mainly the use of "**AND**") to structure your search query

If you don't find anything, "broaden" your search

Cast your net a bit wider:
    Have you identified and searched using alternative phrases and synonyms for your keywords?
    Make correct use of Boolean operators (e.g. truncation and the use of "**OR**")
    If the database has a "**search history**", use that to create larger and more complex searches
    Move onto the next most relevant database if you cannot find what you want. Repeat your search there

Tips . . .

Use help screens to assist you
    They will tell you how to construct your search, and what features the database has
Use a thesaurus to help you select the most apt terms and keywords
    Thesaurus terms accurately describe the subject content of a reference
Use "truncation" or "wildcard" symbols (commonly an *)
    Pick up variations in spelling or plural forms of a word
If you still have too many search results
    Try using a "**limit**" function to restrict the references (e.g. to English language, or last five years of publication)