Subject Searching on Westlaw

Terms and Connectors searching is the most powerful and precise way to search Westlaw. Using these techniques allows you to take full advantage of the powerful search engine built in to this system.

The Search Form takes you step-by-step through the process of creating a search on Westlaw. See below for some examples.

1. **Define your issue carefully**. State it precisely in one sentence. Avoid being narrower or broader than is necessary.

    e.g., if you seek cases on "the saying of prayers at school assembly", the issue "when is religion permitted in schools" is probably too broad, and the issue "may a student say the Lord's Prayer at a school assembly" might be too narrow.

2. **Circle the key terms in your issue statement**. Key terms are words most closely related to your issue. Exclude words so common that they are likely to turn up in many documents unrelated to your issue.

    2a. Write these key terms in the **Terms** boxes at the top of the **Search Form**. If two or more key terms both relate to only one aspect of issue, list them vertically, as alternatives, as in the example below.

3. **Consider whether alternative terms might appear in a relevant document**. Consider synonyms (car/automobile) and antonyms (admissible/inadmissible). Consider also broader or narrower or related terms (car/vehicle/truck/motorcycle…).

    3a. List the alternatives to your key terms in the columns below each key term

4. **Use truncation (!) or the universal character (*) to account for variations of key terms**.

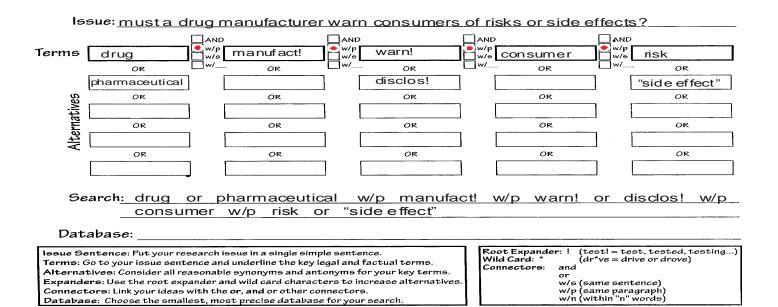   e.g. discrim! retrieves discriminate, discriminating, discriminated….

    kn*w retrieves know or knew

    test*** retrieves test, tested, testing, testify… but not testimony or testamentary

5. **Use connectors to specify the relationship between key terms**. The two major connectors are the or connector and the and connector and its variations.

    5a. Use the **or** connector between alternatives.

    5b. Use the **&** (and) connector or its variant forms: **/p** or **/s** or **/n** (where n is a number of words, e.g., **/2** finds one keyword within two words of another keyword). When in doubt, start with a grammatical connector (**/p** find within the same paragraph; or **/s** find within the same sentence).

    5c. Westlaw processes connectors in this order: **or /n /s /p &**

6. **Remember Westlaw uses "quotation marks" for phrases.**

Issue: must a drug manufacturer warn consumers of risks or side effects?

Terms				
drug	manufact!	warn!	consumer	risk
pharmaceutical		disclos!		"side effect"

Search: drug or pharmaceutical w/p manufact! w/p warn! or disclos! w/p consumer w/p risk or "side effect"

Database: _____

Issue Sentence: Put your research issue in a single simple sentence. **Terms:** Go to your issue sentence and underline the key legal and factual terms. **Alternatives:** Consider all reasonable synonyms and antonyms for your key terms. **Expanders:** Use the root expander and wild card characters to increase alternatives. **Connectors:** Link your ideas with the or, and or other connectors. **Database:** Choose the smallest, most precise database for your search.	**Root Expander:** ! (test! = test, tested, testing…) **Wild Card:** * (dr*ve = drive or drove) **Connectors:** and or w/s (same sentence) w/p (same paragraph) w/n (within "n" words)

Issue: _____

Terms

[ ] &		[ ] &		[ ] &	
[ ] /p		[ ] /p		[ ] /p	
[ ] /s		[ ] /s		[ ] /s	
[ ] /n		[ ] /n		[ ] /n	

or   or   or   or

Alternatives

or   or   or   or

or   or   or   or

Search Strategy: _____

_____

Database: _____

Constructing a Search Strategy

Issue: Put your research issue in a single sentence

Terms: Go to your 'Issue' sentence and circle the key legal and factual terms

Alternatives: Consider all reasonable synonyms and antonyms for your key terms

Expanders: Use the root expander and wildcard characters to increase alternatives

Connectors: Link your keywords with the *or, & (and)* or other connectors

Database: Choose the smallest, most relevant database for your search

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Westlaw Search Rules

Root Expander ! e.g. **test!** finds **test, tests, tester, testing ....**

Wildcard * e.g. **super*ede** finds **supercede, supersede**

Connectors: and or /p /s /n

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