# Effective Legal Database Searching: Using Search Operators

This handout is designed to help you to use search operators for the following databases: Westlaw, Lawtel, PLC, Lexis Library, HeinOnline, and CityLibrary Search. Remember that the best search results come from building an effective search. Here are some tips:

- Plan your search by identifying keywords, related terms and synonyms, and remember to note the ones you use
- Ensure that you are using the correct spelling or citation
- Familiarise yourself with each databases’ Advanced Search functions and remember to filter your results
- Use search operators to build more complex searches

## Common Search Operators and Examples of Use

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<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Databases and Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>No connectors</strong></td>
<td>Westlaw, Lawtel, PLC, HeinOnline, CityLibrary Search will automatically connect search terms using <strong>AND</strong>. Lexis Library will automatically search by <strong>exact phrase</strong>.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>AND</strong></td>
<td>Westlaw, Lawtel use <strong>AND</strong> or <strong>&amp;</strong>. PLC only uses <strong>&amp;</strong>. Lexis Library, CityLibrary Search use <strong>AND</strong>. Example: Brexit AND Aviation or Brexit &amp; Aviation. HeinOnline uses <strong>&amp;</strong> or <strong>AND</strong>. Example: Brexit <strong>&amp;&amp;</strong> Aviation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OR</strong></td>
<td>Westlaw, Lawtel, PLC, Lexis Library, HeinOnline, CityLibrary Search use <strong>OR</strong>. Example: Cargo OR Shipment OR Freight.</td>
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<td><strong>Exact Phrase</strong></td>
<td>Westlaw, Lawtel, PLC, HeinOnline, CityLibrary Search use <strong>“”</strong>. Lexis Library will automatically search by <strong>exact phrase</strong>. Example: “Montreal Convention” Montreal Convention. Example: Montreal Convention.</td>
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<td><strong>Proximity Search</strong></td>
<td>Westlaw, Lawtel use <strong>/s /p /n</strong>. Example: Export <strong>/s</strong> China. Example: Export <strong>/p China</strong>. Example: Export <strong>/10 China</strong>. (n = 10) PLC only uses <strong>/p /n</strong>. Example: Export <strong>w/s China</strong>. Example: Export <strong>w/p China</strong>. Example: Export <strong>w/10 China</strong>. HeinOnline uses “search term”<strong>“n</strong>. Example: “Export China”<strong>“-10</strong>.</td>
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| **NOT** | Searches for everything in front of the operator **NOT** and excludes all terms which appear after it. This is useful for excluding common terms that may be irrelevant to your search.  
**Note:** Use this last in your search string as it may override the other operators. |
| Westlaw, PLC use %.
Example: Emirates % Airline | Lexis Library uses **AND NOT**.
Example: Emirates **AND NOT** Airline |
| Lawtel, CityLibrary Search use **NOT**.
Example: Emirates **NOT** Airline | HeinOnline uses **NOT** or !.
Example: Emirates **NOT** Airline or Emirates ! Airline |
| **Wildcard** | Replaces a single character in a word. This can help you search for variations of a word including regional differences in spelling. |
| Westlaw, PLC, Lexis Library use **•**.
Example: wom**•**n will search for woman and women | Lawtel, HeinOnline, CityLibrary Search use ?.
Example: organi?ation will search for organisation and organization |
| **Root** | Searches for words which have the same root but different endings. This can be used to search for grammatical variations of a word. |
| Westlaw, PLC, Lexis Library use !.
Lawtel, HeinOnline, CityLibrary Search use **•**.
Example: charit! and charit**•** will search for charity, charities, charitable |  |
| **Note:** Be careful when selecting the word root. Shortening a root too much could produce irrelevant results.  
Example: A search for leg! will retrieve results such as legal, legacy, legitimate, legislation. However, a search for legitima! will retrieve results such as legitimate and legitimacy.  
For CityLibrary Search, you can also use **•** to search for a word with a different spelling.  
Example: behavio**•**r will search for behavior or behaviour |

**Further Help**

Note that each database uses slightly different search operators so carefully construct your searches. For more detailed guidance, check the databases’ respective help pages or online user manual. If you need further assistance, email us at lawlibrary@city.ac.uk or ask any staff member at the Help Desk.

You can also book an appointment with a Subject Librarian for Law at libguides.city.ac.uk/Lawappt.