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Boolean operators in search queries

ABSTRACT. This article deals with using Boolean operators in search engine queries. The author distinguishes between the basic and the advanced use of these operators based on three criteria. The first is a syntactic one. As for basic use cases, there is no risk of an amphiboly error, which occurs with advanced use. The second criterion is a semantic one. It concerns the relationships between sets of search results. The basic use of operators either only expands these results or only restricts them. On the other hand, advanced usage both expands and restricts search results at the same time. The last criterion is a pragmatic one and it takes into account technological aspects. Basic use is relatively independent of the search engines that are being utilized, while advanced use is highly dependent on the search engines in use. The author also draws attention to two combinations of operators that are used in advanced search. They are very useful for formulating complex and non-trivial queries because they allow one to significantly reduce the number of redundant search results.

KEY WORDS: search engines, search queries, information literacy, Boolean operators, amphiboly

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