Creating a Terms and Connectors Search

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

The Handy All-Purpose Search Form takes you step-by-step through the process of creating a search on both Westlaw and LexisNexis. 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 prayer at public school graduations, the issue "when is religion permitted in public schools" is probably too broad, and the issue "may a student say the Lord's Prayer at a public school graduation" 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 **Handy All-Purpose 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. (For example, if your issue involves an attorney, likely alternatives would be lawyer or counsel) 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 alternative.

5b. Use the **and** connector or its variant forms: **w/p** or **w/s** or **w/#,** (where **#** is a number, e.g., **w/2**) between your groups of key terms. When in doubt, start with a grammatical connector (**w/p** or **w/s).**

5c. Lexis and Westlaw process connectors in this order:

or   w/n   w/s   w/p   and

You can override this search order by using parentheses:

bit! w/p dog or (german w/s shepard)

Handy All-Purpose Search Form

Issue: _May a prayer or benediction be given at a school graduation?_

Terms				
pray!	school	graduat!		
OR benediction		*OR* commencement		
OR invocation				

Search: _pray! or benediction or invocation w/p school w/p graduat! or commencement_