

PROXIMITY SEARCHING  
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January 2008

If you do online searching, the following information on **Proximity Searching** may save hours of time and lots of frustration.

Why use Proximity Searching?

Many times researchers have two concepts or words which appear to be related and should be found close together in journal articles or in documents on the Internet. To limit a search to only those articles or documents, researchers need to use Proximity Searching.

1.

If the **ProQuest Full Text Journal** databases are being used, the researcher should go to Advanced Search and then click on the drop down list of Boolean terms. Especially note the ones, Near/3 and Pre/1, because these are useful for Proximity Searches.

**Near/3** is used when two words should be found within 3 words of each other but you do not care which one is first.

**Pre/1** is used when the two words should be adjacent to each other and in the order given.

When another spacing is needed within Advanced Search, *ProQuest Help* gives this information (this asks the user to click the drop-down menu under Citation and Abstract **to locate "Citation and Document Text"**):

**W/#** Use to find documents where the words are within some number of words apart (either before or after). Use when searching for keywords within "Citation and Document Text" or "Document Text." *Example:* computer W/3 careers.

**W/PARA** This finds documents where these words are within the same paragraph (within approx. 1000 characters). Use when searching for keywords within "Document Text." *Example:* internet W/PARA education.

**W/DOC** Use to find documents where all the words appear within the document text. Use W/DOC in place of AND when searching keywords within "Citation and Document Text" or "Document Text" to retrieve more comprehensive results. *Example:* Internet W/DOC education

**NOT W/#** Use to find documents where these words appear but are not within some number of words apart (either before or after). Use when searching for keywords within "Citation and Document Text" or "Document Text." *Example:* computer NOT W/2 careers.

**PRE/#** Use to find documents where the first word appears some number of words before the second word. Use when searching for keywords within "Citation and Document Text" or "Document Text." *Example:* world pre/3 web.

2.

If **EBSCOhost** databases are being used, the researcher should go to Help (in the upper right-hand corner), and then click on Proximity Searching in the left-hand list.

EBSCO's examples show N5 and W8 being used. The N5 is used when the two words must be with 5 words of each other but not in a specific order. The W8 is used when the two words must be within 8 words of each other and in that order. **NOTE:** you may **change the numbers** and use any number from 1 to about 20.

Ex.: apple N2 tree would find both apple tree and apple on tree, plus tree with apple.

3

If the **Google search engine** is being used on the Internet, GAPS (Google API Proximity Search) was created by Kevin Shay and may be found at <http://www.staggernation.com/cgi-bin/gaps.cgi> . It is discussed as "Hack #71: Performing Proximity Searches", in *Google Hacks: 100 Industrial-Strength Tips & Tools*, by Tara Calishain & Rael Dornfest. Beijing: O'Reilly, 2003. p.222-225.

Google's own Cheat Sheet as suggests: use \* to locate two words close together: i.e., red \* blue (will find the two words separated by one or more words; i.e., **proximity searching**)

4.

The **Exalead search engine** [www.exalead.com](http://www.exalead.com) **may also be used**. Enter NEAR between two terms to find them within 16 words of each other. (Randolph Hock. *Extreme Searchers Internet Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2007, p.128)

5.

If **InfoTrac (Thomson-Gale)** databases are being used (in another library), the Help screens there say:

### **Proximity Operators**

Proximity operators are used between two search terms to indicate that the terms must occur in a record within a specified distance of each other for that record to match. Words that are close to each other are more likely to be related than words that are far apart.

A proximity operator has two components:

- A **letter** that indicates the *direction*
- A **number** that indicates the *distance* in words

There are two proximity operators:

**Wn** The **W** (within) operator specifies that the word that follows the operator must occur within *n* words *after* the word that precedes the operator for a record to match. For example, the search expression **shared w3 values** matches any records in which the word *values* occurs three or fewer words after the word *shared*.

**Nn** The **N** (near) operator specifies that the words on either side of the operator must occur within *n* words of each other *in either direction* for a record to match. For example, the search expression **memory n5 repressed** matches any records in which the words *memory* and *repressed* occur within five or fewer words of each other in either direction.

You can use proximity operators only when searching indexes made up of individual words, such as a title index. They are most useful in indexes of large areas of text, such as keyword and full-text indexes.

Note that proximity operators can be used only between two words, not between a word and an expression within nesting operators (parentheses):

Invalid expression: **fleas n10 (dogs or cats)**

Valid alternative: **fleas n10 dogs or fleas n10 cats**