Advanced Search
Legal Research Center Video Series

David Isom
What we will cover

Advanced search techniques, including:

- Search settings
- Choosing terms
- Connectors (AND, OR, and beyond)
- Processing order
Search settings

Note the following settings which affect search results in significant ways:

Lexis
- Include legal phrase equivalents with search

Westlaw
- Always run these searches as Boolean Terms and Connectors:
  - Searches containing **AND**, **OR**, **&**, or quoted phrases
  - Searches containing only a single quoted phrase
What would you like to research today?

Enter a source name, a citation, terms or shep: [citation] to Shepard.
Settings

General

Lexis+™

Display this page by default when signing in

Lexis+™ home

Search

- Include legal phrase equivalents with search
- Recognize and use legal entities when performing a search

Search Filters

- Keep my search filters from one search to the next

Include search suggestions from the following groups

- Legal phrases
- Suggested Questions
- Documents
- Sources

Results

Display search results in this category first

Cases

Preferred results set display

- Standard (Shows top results)
- Expanded (Shows all results)

Category Display

Case law (does not apply in condensed view)

- Show Overview (Shows an editorial summary of the document)
- Show Terms (Shows the overview plus a view of search terms in context)
- Show Extract (Shows the overview plus a view of a section of the document)
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**Specialty areas**

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**Profile**

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**Preferences**

- Subscription
- Contacts
- Training and support
- Update OnePass profile

**Litigation Analytics**

View insights on judges, attorneys, law firms, courts, and case types to build a winning case strategy.

**Quick Check**

Securly upload your brief or motion to quickly find new authority and related law.
Natural language searches

- Default search method on both Lexis and Westlaw
- Similar to Google searches—enter a search phrase in plain English
- Common words like “is” and “for” may be ignored
- Key concepts in the phrase may be automatically identified, such as legal phrases
- Variations of terms you’ve entered may be automatically included ("defamed" → "defamation")
Why use terms & connectors?

Versus natural language searches:

- More control and precision leads to more relevant results
- Increased efficiency: can reduce research time (and, therefore, save your firm/your client money)
- Heavily used in practice

*Note: You cannot mix natural language and terms and connectors search phrases.*
Terms & connectors

How to specify a terms and connectors search:

- Lexis: if search phrase includes a connector such as AND or OR (but not the root expander or wildcard characters), it will automatically be run as a terms and connectors search.

- Westlaw: by default, if search phrase includes a proximity connector, a root expander, or wildcard, it will be run as a terms & connectors search; optionally, if AND, OR, or text in quotation marks.

Can also prepend advanced: or adv: to your search query.
Terms & connectors

Terms

- Words and phrases capturing the core concepts
- Express legal concepts, factual scenarios

Connectors

- Commands for searching
- Choose based on relationships between the terms being connected
- Neither too broad nor too narrow: connectors have a significant impact on the number of search results returned (both positively and negatively)
Terms

Synonyms

• noncompete clause, noncompete agreement, covenant not to compete
• driving under the influence, driving while intoxicated

Antonyms

• constitutional, unconstitutional
• buyer, seller

Related concepts

• alcohol, liquor, spirits, beer, wine, drugs, narcotics
• defamation, slander, libel
Does the state of Nevada have the death penalty?

Key terms:
- death penalty, Nevada

Related terms (synonyms, antonyms, concepts):
- death sentence, execution, capital punishment, lethal injection
Does the state of Utah forbid the sale of alcohol on Sunday?

Key terms:
- sale, alcohol, Sunday, Utah

Related terms (synonyms/antonyms/concepts):
- sale
  - sell, purchase, buy
- alcohol
  - spirits, beer, wine, liquor
- Sunday
  - Sabbath
Is a café liable for hot coffee spilled on a patron?

Key terms:
  • café, hot coffee, spill, patron, liable

Related terms (synonyms/antonyms/concepts):
  • café
    • restaurant, bar
  • hot coffee
    • hot beverage, drink, liquid, food
  • patron
    • customer
  • liable
    • responsible
Exact phrases

You can search for an exact phrase by enclosing it in quotation marks: “like this”

- Searches for the phrase exactly as it appears enclosed in quotation marks

- Use carefully
  - “noncompete clause”
    - What about covenant not to compete, noncompetition agreement, noncompete covenant, etc.?

- Useful for terms of art, Latin phrases, etc.
  - “double jeopardy”
Word variations

Root expander: !

- Substitutes for letters at the end of a root of your choosing
- Use truncation instead of all variations:
  - contract! = contract, contracts, contracted, contracting, contractual
- Proceed carefully: is consti! a good way to truncate “constitution”?

*Note: Lexis allows a terminal * as equivalent to !*
Word variations

Universal character (“wildcard”): *

• Placeholder for single character
• Can use within a term
  • \textit{mari}^{*}uana = marijuana, marihuana (e.g. Texas statutes)
• May use more than one
  • \textit{int}^{**}net = internet, intranet
  • \textit{bl}^{**}d = bleed, blood
• Think critically
  • \textit{bl}^{**}d = blind, bland, blend

\textbf{Note: Lexis allows} ? \textit{as equivalent to} \textit{*}
Basic connectors

AND

- Retrieves documents with all terms
  - *divorce AND insurance*
- Lacks precision
- Use conservatively
Basic connectors

OR

- Retrieves documents with any term
- Variations
  - liable OR liability
- Synonyms
  - car OR automobile OR vehicle

Note: Westlaw treats a space between terms or phrases as an implied OR connector, e.g. car automobile vehicle is interpreted as car OR automobile OR vehicle
Proximity connectors

/n
• Within # of words
  • oral /5 contract

/s
• Within the same sentence
  • execution /s will

/p
• Within the same paragraph
  • administration /p coach
Ensure relevance

NOT

- Westlaw: BUT NOT (%)
- Lexis: AND NOT
- Exclude documents with the terms that follow it
- Add to the end of the search phrase:
  - rico % puerto

ATLEASTn(term)

- Retrieves documents with the term at least $n$ times
  - ATLEAST5(gravity)
Putting terms & connectors together

How would you reconstruct “noncompete clause” for more effective results?

• No exact phrase
• noncompete OR compete
• noncompet! OR compet!
• clause OR agreement OR covenant
• compet! OR non-compet! /5 clause OR agreement OR covenant
Putting terms & connectors together

• More alternate terms (joined with OR) are generally better than fewer.

• Proximity connectors (/n, /s, /p) are generally preferable to AND.

• Skew towards broader connectors—if unsure how close to put two terms, use a /p instead of /s.

• Number of results is not an indicator of the quality of the search.
More connectors

Similar (but not identical) across the major platforms

• Westlaw □ Advanced (under “Connectors and Expanders” heading)

• Lexis □ Advanced □ (under “Use Connectors”; click “View all connectors and commands” for more)
Processing order

• Lexis and Westlaw process all connectors in a specific order

• Each connector has a different priority

• Order of processing can drastically affect how terms are searched
Using parentheses

(terms AND connectors) /p “exact phrase”

- Forces search to be processed in the order you want
- Parentheses are always processed first
- Group terms together by concept—helps organize your search

(due /3 process) /20 (fourteenth /2 amendment)

Set 1 = due /3 process
Set 2 = fourteenth /2 amendment
Set 3 = Set 1 results /20 Set 2 results
Basic processing order

Westlaw
1. “exact phrase”
2. OR
3. /n
4. /s
5. /p
6. AND

Lexis
1. “exact phrase”
2. OR
3. /n, /s, /p
   (from smallest to largest; /s = /25, /p = /75)
4. AND
Processing order: examples

Multiples of the same connector are processed from left to right

\[ \text{rent /s deduct /s repair} \]
- Set 1 = \( \text{rent /s deduct} \)
- Set 2 = Set 1 results \( /s \text{ repair} \)

Smaller numeric proximity connectors processed first

\[ \text{due /3 process /20 fourteenth /2 amendment} \]
- Set 1 = \( \text{fourteenth /2 amendment} \)
- Set 2 = \( \text{due /3 process} \)
- Set 3 = Set 2 results \( /20 \text{ Set 1 results} \)
Processing order: examples

14\textsuperscript{th} OR fourteenth /s amendment
\textit{due process} AND state

- Set 1: “due process”
- Set 2: 14\textsuperscript{th} OR fourteenth
- Set 3: Set 2 results /s amendment
- Set 4: Set 3 results /p Set 1 results
- Set 5: Set 4 results AND state
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