Informit Search Syntax Changes Overview: Search Query Support & Tips

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Purpose: This document provides background for changes to search syntax introduced with Informit v3.7 released in January 2013, and a list of tips to improve results for your search query. The document is intended to support searchers, such as librarians and researchers, who create complex search queries.

Background: Syntax changes implemented with Informit Search, v3.7 (released January 2013)

Important changes included:

- Default search query evaluation changed from phrase to word
- Relevance ranking introduced
- Boolean operators: upper-case letters required for Boolean operators in word form; or word form can be substituted with equivalent Boolean symbol operator
- Field searching: Equals operator [**=**] changed to colon operator [**:**]

1. Default search changed from phrase to word

The following example illustrates how default query evaluation changed in Informit.
          Search query: ***global warming***

Informit Search v3.7 and earlier:

Looked for exact phrase 'global warming' (not for each word, i.e. 'global' and 'warming')

          Result: All records containing the exact phrase 'global warming' would be retrieved.

Since Informit Search v.3.7 and later:

Looks for 'global warming' AND 'global' AND 'warming' anywhere in a record and then ranks the results.

          Result:
                    - All records containing the exact phrase 'global warming' are retrieved.
                    - All records containing the word 'global' are retrieved.
                    - All records containing the word 'warming' are retrieved.
                    - Final step: All records are **ranked**: That is, all records retrieved by the search query are listed with the most relevant records first (i.e. any records with the exact phrase 'global warming' in important fields such as 'Title, 'Abstract', 'Subjects' will be more highly ranked than records with only the words 'global' or 'warming')

2. Relevance Ranking introduced

Relevance ranking was introduced in Informit 3.7 to search results for a search query. The change in the default search from phrase to word, along with ranking of results, has been a real improvement for many searchers, particularly those used to search engines like Google.

3. Boolean operators: word form of Boolean must be in upper-case letters

The word version of Boolean operators must be upper-case; lower-case words are no longer recognised as operators; the words 'and', 'or', 'not' are treated as search terms. However, Boolean operator symbols can be used instead. Once you are familiar with them, these symbols can make the query easier to maintain.

Option 1 – upper-case boolean	Option 2 – Boolean operator symbol		This no longer works
global AND warming	global + warming	**+** [plus symbol] -- replaces AND	global and warming
law OR reform	global | warming	**|** [pipe symbol] -- replaces OR	global or warming
law NOT reform	global -warming	[space hyphen] -- replaces NOT	global not warming

4. Field searching: Equals operator [=] to colon operator [:]

Relevance ranking was introduced in Informit 3.7 to improve the potential search results for a search query.

Description	Search Query Example
Find 'agriculture' in the 'Subject(s)' field	**su:agriculture**
Find the words 'world war' as an exact phrase in the 'Title' field	**ti:"world war"**
Find 'Bourke' in any 'Author'[1] type field AND the word 'Metaphor' in the 'Source' field	**AUTHOR:burke AND SO:metaphor**
Find 'Global warming' as an exact term, in any 'Subject'[2] type field.	**SUBJECT:"global warming"**

5. Reasons for the changes to Informit's Search Query language/syntax:

- to make searching syntax more Google-like
- to assist naive searchers to find required results (by widening out the search to look for every word entered in every combination and then rank from *most* to *least* relevant). This causes far more results to be found (due to the extra records being retrieved for each individual word in the search query not enclosed in quotation marks), **so it is useful for more advanced searchers to create more precise search queries, e.g. enclosing search terms of more than one word within quotation marks to find precise hits on those terms, e.g. "global warming"**

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[1] The **AUTHOR** field is a pseudo field designed to search across the author fields in the database(s) you are currently searching. Terms located via a search query using the AUTHOR field appear in any of the author type fields in the database, e.g. **Personal Author (PA)**, **Corporate Author (CA)**, **Author (AU)**, **Added Author (AUA)**, etc.

[2] The **SUBJECT** field is a pseudo field designed to search across the subject fields in the database(s) you are currently searching. Terms located via a search query using the SUBJECT field appear in any of the subject type fields in the database, e.g. **Subject (Major) [SMJ]**, **Subject (Minor) [SMI]**, **Subject (SU)**, etc.

Search Tips to improve results you retrieve

Tip	Example	More information
Enclose terms with more than one word in quotation marks for more precise searching. NB: Informit no longer evaluates search terms as phrases by default. Example 1	Enter search: **"mobile computing"** NOT **mobile computing**	This is one of the search tips that is likely to make a big difference to results for your search query. Because the default search evaluation has changed from searching for the phrase (when more than one word is entered) to searching for the phrase and every word in the phrase – it means that the search will retrieve records for both the phrase and each word as well. This change was made to help naïve searchers used to searching in a Google-like way (which is the case for many students); however, for a complex search on Informit records, it is now better to revise previous search queries by using quotation marks to enforce phrase term searching ("**word1 word2 word3**" – see example 2 for a 3 word example)
Example 2	Enter search: **"physical therapy modalities"** NOT **physical therapy modalities**	
Terms that include an **hyphen** character need to be enclosed in quotation marks Example 1	Enter search: **"post-mining"** NOT **post-mining**	Enclosing a term containing a hyphen in quotation marks ensures that the hyphen is not treated as a range search operator.

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Example 2	**"mp3-player"** NOT **mp3-player**	
Truncation (*) character needs to list after the quotation mark, not before it	**"handheld computer"*** NOT **"handheld computer*"**	This query will find 'handheld computer' and 'handheld computers', etc. This query will only find 'handheld computer' – the truncation character (*) is ignored because it is enclosed in quotation marks (**" "**)
Restoration marks[3] **(" ")**	"NOT" AND dog	Reserved terms AND, OR, NOT, etc. Reserved terms are case sensitive. When searching for a term that corresponds to a reserved term, the term must be escaped with quotes. Search for records with the terms **"NOT"** **AND "dog"**.
A note on data entry of quotation marks for phrases/exact terms **(" ")**	**"post-mining"** NOT "post-mining"	ASCII: quotation mark[4] (") VS. ASCII: Opening Double Quotation Mark[5] (") / ASCII: Closing Double Quotation Mark[6] (") Ensure the correct character is used in search queries – this can be very frustrating when the wrong quotation mark character is used. NB: This may only be a problem if you copy and paste from another file – when you enter search queries directly into Informit search there should be no problem.

For more information on searching Informit
Search Hints: https://www.informit.org/prepare-search
More detailed information on searching Informit: https://www.informit.org/specific-searches

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[3] Restoration marks are also referred to as quotation marks.
[4] ASCII value 34
[5] ASCII value 147
[6] ASCII value 148

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General Help (including the above sections)
Go to: https://www.informit.org/informit-help-faqs and click the **Informit Help** tab – this will take you to the general help.

Informit is accessible without login for Collections and APAFT
http://search.informit.org/
Informit provides 9 databases that you can search without requiring a login – the records and fields can be searched from anywhere at any time. Login is only required to view the full text of articles. This may be handy if you want to try searching Informit away from your desk, office or in-house network.