



# Library Glossary

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**Abstract:** a brief summary of an article or book that helps you to decide if you want to locate and read the whole article or book.

**Abstracts:** a term sometimes used to describe indexes / databases which provide such summaries.

**Boolean operators:** "boolean" refers to a system of logical thought developed by an English mathematician, George Boole. In searching electronic databases the system uses three operators:

The "OR" operator between two words (e.g. "pear OR apple") searches for documents containing either of the words.

The "AND" operator between two words (e.g. "pear AND apple") searches for documents containing both of the words, not just one of them.

The "NOT" operator between two words (e.g. "pear NOT apple") searches for documents containing only the first word, but not the other.

**CD-ROM:** Compact Disc Read-Only Memory. A small plastic disk, similar to audio compact disks, used for storing information in digital format. The information is read by a laser beam and displayed on a computer screen.

**Citation:** the elements that describe an information resource e.g. books, articles, films, theses. Citations to articles typically include: author, title of article, title of journal, volume number, issue number, date, page numbers. Also called **bibliographic citations** or **references**. Include citations acknowledging sources in the bibliographies or footnotes of essays.

**Citation Index:** a journal index which, as well as details of articles, lists the references cited by the articles in their bibliographies or footnotes. The "Cited reference search" option enables you to track responses to earlier publications. Available via *Web of Science*.

**Database:** An electronic database is any collection of logically related records or files organized for rapid searching by a computer and enabling extraction, grouping or sorting of data. It may be stored on a CD-ROM, a computer disk, laser disk, magnetic tape or the Web. Examples you may encounter in daily life are airline reservation systems and Library catalogues.

Library databases include journal indexes, directories, company data, statistics and full text-books. The term **databases** is sometimes used as a short hand for one type of database: **journal indexes**.

**Databases consist of records**, each representing an item ( e.g. a journal article).

**Records consist of standard fields** each containing details about an item. e.g. in a Library catalogue there is a record for each book or item. Each record has separate fields for the author, title, classification, date of publication, subject headings etc. A field is the smallest unit to be

manipulated as a single piece of information. Most databases enable users to specify the particular field/s to be searched.

**Descriptor:** SEE Subject heading

**Ejournal:** a journal available in full text electronically.

**Field:** see Database

**Full text:** a whole article, book or document available online, or included with the index. e.g. you can print out an article, instead of having to find the journal in the library and photocopy the article.

**Interface:** the user interface is the software that enables the user to work with the computer e.g. menus, graphics, icons, commands. Library databases from different vendors have different interfaces e.g. *Web of Science*, *Silverplatter*, *Proquest*.

**Index:** an alphabetical list or table (of people, subjects etc) that points to or specifies the contents in a document or group of documents to help locate information precisely.

**Journal or periodical indexes:** regularly index the contents of journals, generally within a specified subject field e.g. *Medline* or area e.g. *Index New Zealand*.  
Now mainly produced as electronic databases e.g. *Historical abstracts*. Some are still in paper format e.g. *Humanities index*.

Indexes provide **citations** for the articles. In addition some give a short summary or **abstract** of each article. Since the mid 1990's some online indexes have provided access to **fulltext**.

**Journal, magazine, periodical, serial:** terms sometimes used interchangeably for publications that appear regularly, intend to continue indefinitely and which contain separate articles.

**Keyword:** a significant word in the abstract, title, subject heading, or text of an entry in an electronic database which can be used as a search term.

**Keyword searches:** two meanings

- words can be input in any order
- words can be searched across all fields in the database.

**Magazines:** popular, non scholarly journals. Rarely give full citations for sources.

**Monograph:** a book, a separate treatise on a single subject.

**Online** refers to communicating with other computers or to devices (e.g. printers) or to other people at computers. They are interacting directly and simultaneously in real time.

**OPAC: Online Public Access Catalogue**, a library catalogue whose records are in electronic format, stored and searchable by computer.

**PDF:** Portable Document Format allows electronic documents to be viewed exactly as in the original paper. Requires Acrobat reader software to view and print. Other full text output options may be offered.

**Record:** see Database

**Refereed:** journals in which articles are peer reviewed by independent experts from the academic and research community to ensure that they are of a suitable standard.

**Serials:** are published on a continuing basis - include journals, magazines, newspapers, yearbooks, almanacs, statutes, parliamentary debates.

**Subject heading:** a standardised term for the main topic or themes of book, article or other publication; usually assigned by a cataloguer or indexer from a controlled vocabulary. Subject headings give alternative indexing to the words authors supply in the titles. Sometimes subject headings are called descriptors.

**Thesaurus:** (controlled vocabulary) - a list of terms or descriptors that provides a standard vocabulary of words to use in searching a certain database. Structured with narrower, broader and related terms, also definitions and preferred terms.

**Truncation:** in database searching, the addition of a symbol (usually ? or \* ) at the end of a word instructs the computer to find all variations of the word stem.  
e.g. "\*" after the stem famil\* means the computer will retrieve "family" and "families."

**URL:** uniform resource locator, the address your browser uses to locate a web page . e.g the university Library's is <http://www.library.otago.ac.nz> URLs are often underlined.

**Wild card:** a symbol inserted within a word to pick up variant spellings. Sometimes used as a synonym for truncation.

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