

QUICK TIPS

What is a Boolean search and how can it help with family history?

Most people eventually hit a brick wall in their family history research. It is a good idea to try a Google search when doing family history. A Boolean search may be the solution to finding an ancestor.



Why can't I find my ancestor online?

- The records might not be there. Keep checking back because new records are continually being added to genealogy sites like FamilySearch.
- Search all versions of your ancestor's name. Try using nicknames and alternate spellings of the surname.
- Search for the husband's first name and the wife's first name in a specific geographic location since their surname might be transcribed incorrectly.
- Try a Boolean search.

What is a Boolean search?

In 1854, George Boole wrote a book called *The Laws of Thought*. It explained how people make decisions. A Boolean search uses concepts that George Boole wrote about and applies his reasoning to present day search engines, such as Google. In this type of search, you specify to the search engine what to look for and what not to look for. It is basically a way of narrowing your results and increasing the relevancy of your results. In a regular search you use a word or series of words that tell the search engine what to search for. A Boolean search requires Boolean operators and an additional search term/s.

What are Boolean operators?

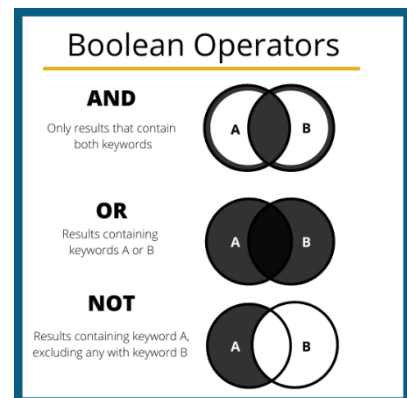
In a Boolean search you add an additional term with **AND**, **OR**, or **NOT** separating the terms. These are called Boolean operators. Some search tools require that Boolean operators be typed in all capital letters, so it is a good policy to always have them in all caps.

AND – Gives you information that matches both things you are searching for.

OR – Gives you information that matches at least one of the things you are searching for but that doesn't match both things.

NOT – Gives you only the information that matches one thing and not the information that matches something you do not want.

When you use Google to do a Boolean search for your ancestor the results are narrowed down for you.



How can you use a Boolean search in family history?

Here's an example of example of how to use more than one of the operators used in Boolean searches at the same time. Let's say you are looking for an ancestor who has several spellings of his surname but there is a certain spelling you do not want included in the search results. You could word the search like this:

Philip Fulkrod OR Foulkrod born 1787 NOT Fulkroad

Cheryl Fugal, August 2022