SIMS 202 Information Organization and Retrieval: Assignment 8 -- Searching with Lexis-Nexis

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Overview

The goals of this assignment are to:

- Give you experience with sophisticated query languages.
- Have you consider how search results differ based on how a query is formulated.
- Have you consider how search results differ based on which collection is searched.
- Give you more experience learning a search interface quickly.

The questions below are intended to get you started and give you some guidance ... Mainly you should view this as an opportunity to learn by doing and exploring. Feel free to talk with other students about it but do your own work. You may even get to research something that you are interested in!

Logistics

First, you need to get a Lexis-Nexis account. Once you have an account, you can use the software on the computers in the lab as well as the web interface. Sign on using the account number that you got from the signup sheet at this address:

> http://www.nexis.com

If you missed the account sheet, get your number from Roberta. While you're doing the exercises below you might get signed off. Don't worry about it if this happens, just sign on again.

Getting Started

Use the online help pages to see how to use the system. (The following may no longer be true of the new interface.) Much of the online help applies to different lexis-nexis interfaces, not just the web interface, so try not to get too confused by it. Also, some of the features described in help are not visible until after you select a source (from the left-hand side of the web interface) and run a query. For example, you can't do Focus until after you've run a query.

What to Turn In

For each of the questions below, be sure to include the query that you used to find the information, as well as a response to the question itself. This assignment is due October 31st.

Questions

(1) Search for articles talking about former US president Ronald Reagan's Alzheimer's disease, first using a news source and then using a medical source (you will need to use Power Search and select additional sources to get older news reports and to access the medical literature).

> (1a) What was your query? What is (generally) the difference between the kinds of articles returned from the two types of sources?
>
> (1b) Follow up on some topic you find interesting from these articles using a modification of your original query. What was your query?
>
> (1c) What is the difference between viewing search results via Document List, Expanded List and KWIC? (Hint - to really appreciate the difference, use the Focus feature and include two different words separated by AND or OR.)
>
> (1d) Can you view results in medical text differently than in news text? If so, how?

(2) **This question refers to power search, not regular search.**

Read through the help pages for Boolean search techniques. Read about Connectors, including changing connector sequences and combining connectors. (Connector is the word Lexis-Nexis uses for Boolean operators.)

> (2a) What is the syntax for stemming of query terms? In other words, how can you compactly indicate assignments OR assigns OR assignment?
>
> (2b) What connector makes it easy to retrieve the various ways a name might appear?
>
> (2c) What is the difference, for Boolean queries, between connectors and commands in Lexis-Nexis?
>
> (2d) How are phrases indicated in Boolean search for Lexis-Nexis? Is there away to search on phrases of more than two words?

(3) **This question refers to power search, not regular search.**

Lexis-Nexis has its own notion of precedence ordering. Read about Combining Connectors.

(3a) What is the precedence ordering of the Lexis-Nexis operators (connectors)?

(3b) In what order does the system interpret the following query?

malaria W/3 jungle OR rain AND forest

(3c) In what order does the system interpret the following query?

drug W/2 cure! W/5 disease OR malaria W/3 jungle OR rain AND forest

(4) Do a search in which you specify some kind of metadata (other than date or title) such as author. How did you specify it? (Hint -- metadata is called Segments in Lexis-Nexis.)

(5) Use Lexis-Nexis to answer these questions: How much did California Senator Dianne Feinstein pay for her house in San Francisco? How much did Bill and Hillary Clinton pay for their house in New York? How did you find this information?

(6) Use lexis-nexis to find the official criminal charges against O.J. Simpson. What source and query did you use?

(7-8) For two queries/topics that are of **interest to you**:

(a) State what your information need is.

(b) State which source(s) you are searching on.

(c) Specify the query in the Boolean format -- what is it?

(d) How many documents did you get back?

(e) Reformulate the query in some manner. If you got many documents back, try to reduce the number returned, otherwise try to increase the number returned. Did this work? If not, why do you think it didn't?

(f) Now specify the more complex query using regular Search (not power search) Do the sets of returned documents seem different in Boolean search in power search vs. using regular search? Describe how they differ qualitatively.