Glossary of Library & Research Terms
Ann Grafstein, MLIS, PhD

Abstract: a short summary of an article or book; abstracts are provided along with citation information in many periodical indexes, and may be written by either the paper's author or an indexer. As distinguished from an **Index**, another use of the term *abstract* is a serial publication that provides abstracts to periodical articles in addition to citation information.

Boolean Searching: a means of narrowing or focusing a search. It involves using **operators** between words, such as **AND, OR, NOT**. In Boolean searching, an "and" operator between two words or other values (for example, **"pear AND apple"**) means one is searching for documents containing both of the words or values, not just one of them. An "or" operator between two words or other values (for example, "**pear OR apple"**) means one is searching for documents containing either of the words. A **"not"** searches for one term but not the other (for example, **"apple NOT pear"**).

Call Numbers: give the location of a book on a library shelf. They also divide a library by subject: books on similar subjects are grouped together in a library. The two most commonly-used call number systems are the **Dewey Decimal System** (largely used in public and school libraries) and the **Library of Congress System** (largely used in academic libraries).

Citation: a written reference to a specific work or portion of a work (book, article, dissertation, report, musical composition, etc.) by a particular author, editor, composer, etc., which clearly identifies the document in which the work is to be found.

Copyright: the exclusive legal right of producers of creative works (books, articles, films, music, artistic work, etc.) to copy, perform or distribute that work, or to grant that right to others. Copyright law is extremely difficult even for lawyers to understand, but in short, you do not have the right, without the written permission of the copyright holder, to copy or distribute work covered by copyright. See also **Public Domain** and **Open Access**.

Database: an organized collection of data in machine-readable form. The most common type of database for library users is a periodical index or an **online catalog**. By entering search terms related to a topic, patrons are able to retrieve information about articles or books of interest from the database.

✓ **Record:** the set of information that constitutes a complete database entry about an item. Examples: the set of items listed about each

person in a telephone book (name, address, telephone number), or all of the information about a book in a library catalog or about an article in a periodicals database).

- ✓ **Field:** one unit of information in a database record. Example: the phone number associated with a person's name in a telephone book, or the author entry in a library catalog.

Descriptor (see also Subject Heading): used to refer to the standardized subject headings established by the producers of periodical databases, such as ERIC or PsycINFO.

Digital Object Identifier (DOI): a permanent, persistent and unique identifier, used for creative works, such as scholarly articles, books or other creative works.

Index: an index allows you to find citations to magazine, newspaper, journal articles, and sometimes books and dissertations on specific topics. *Index* also refers to the alphabetical arrangement of topics alongside there locations in a book or multivolume encyclopedia.

Keyword: a content word that describes the topic about which you are searching for information. **Boolean Searching** is used to combine keywords with connectors such as AND, OR, and NOT in order to retrieve relevant results.

Online Catalog: a publicly accessible electronic database for locating materials in a library. Also called **OPACs** (Online Public Access Catalogs), they are searchable by author, title, subject or keyword.

Open Access: online books or journals that may be freely used and distributed, usually with the exception that they may not be used for commercial purposes. See http://libguides.hofstra.edu/c.php?g=323353&p=4154745 and http://libguides.hofstra.edu/openaccess for more information.

Peer Review: the process by which articles are often selected for scholarly books and periodicals. An editor solicits reviews from recognized experts in the field in which the work was written. These experts make recommendations regarding whether or not it should be published.

Periodical: a publication that appears periodically, including newspapers, journals or magazines.

- ✓ **Journal:** a periodical that treats a specific issue, in which the articles are written by experts in a scholarly discipline, and which is intended for an audience of either scholars or students. Journal articles usually include footnotes and bibliography.

- ✓ **Magazine:** intended for a general audience. Magazine articles are usually written either by staff or free lance writers, rather than by scholars in the field. Magazine articles do not contain footnotes or bibliographies.

Public Domain: a creative work that is no longer covered by **copyright**, allowing free access to download, copy, or perform that work.

Scholarly/Popular:

- ✓ **Scholarly** defined by Merriam Webster's as "of, characteristic of, or suitable to learned persons." Scholarly literature is material produced by scholars or experts in the field and directed at a learned or academic audience. Claims and facts are **documented** in the form of notes and reference lists. **Most academic research requires the use of scholarly sources.**

- ✓ **Popular** according to the Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, *popular* means "of or relating to the general public." Popular literature is material that is directed at a general audience. Popular sources do not typically include documentation. Popular literature is usually not suitable for research, unless popular culture is the object of research.

Searching:

- ✓ **Keyword Searching:** a search that tries to match the search string (the words in the search) to the words in one or more fields of a record. So, for example, a keyword search for "Dickens" could be matched with that very same word in the title, the subject descriptions, the summary, the author fields, and sometimes the full text of an article in an electronic database. Useful when you do not know the subject terms used by the database. A keyword search is also useful for identifying the subject terms used by a database.

- ✓ **Subject Searching**: a search that is limited to a specific set of subject headings that have been assigned by the producers of a database, or according to the Library of Congress **Subject Headings** in an online catalog. Subject headings are useful for limiting a search to documents that are "about" a particular term, rather than just those which contain a term.

Subject Heading (see also Descriptor): a term, name, or phrase used to provide subject access to items in a catalog or index which is arranged by topic. Generally, any particular index will use a standardized set of subject headings, which improves the relevance of a search once the user determines the "approved" headings being used for their topic.

Thesaurus: an alphabetical list of the standardized set of subject headings used in online catalogs (Library of Congress Subject Headings) or in periodical databases (as an example, see the thesaurus in PsycINFO). Shows how the subject headings are used in the database, and indicates broader, narrower or related terms that can also be searched.

Truncation or Wildcard: the use of a symbol after part of a search term**.** These wildcards or truncation symbols instruct the search engine to retrieve all **records** that contain all forms of the truncated term. Symbols vary according to the database, but the most commonly used are ***, !, ?, or #**. Examples: **child*** will retrieve child, child, children, childhood; and **librar*** will retrieve library, libraries, librarian, librarianship.