

Litigation Support

Document Forensics and Legal Holds

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Tips and Tricks for Creating a Search Term List

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Creating a search term list can be a daunting task even when you're familiar with your document collection. It doesn't matter whether it is a list to search for relevant documents, privileged documents or something more unique, refining your search terms to locate that "smoking gun" isn't easy. Try these ideas to boost your confidence in the outcome of your next search:

- Build plenty of time into your discovery plan to allow for creating your list, reviewing the results, refining the terms and running the list again. Most people underestimate the time that will be required to create an accurate search term list.
- Find someone who is familiar with the documents in your collection to assist you. Someone that has used a particular form that you want to locate might know that the name of the form changed over time. You can then add or change terms to find that version.
- Be sure and allow for variations of terms and acronyms to ensure that you are not missing documents. When searching for names, include aliases, nicknames and e-mail addresses; and allow for possible typographical errors and misspellings.
- Make sure you understand how to write terms correctly for your particular software. It won't matter how well you choose your terms if the incorrect

wildcard is used. If you are unsure of the outcome, seek out a programmer or other expert to assist you.

- Avoid overly broad terms, especially when the document collection was done in a sweeping manner.
- Run test searches of your individual terms before running the entire list. If you can discover that a term is too broad or too specific in the beginning of the task, you can save yourself a good deal of time in the long run.
- Don't be afraid to refine your terms. Try variations until you have just the right balance to find what you need without pulling up unnecessary documents. However, make adjustments for the right reasons! Make sure you are changing search terms to actually respond to a request or to be more exact in finding the right information, not simply to reduce costs or to avoid producing certain documents.
- Don't just look at the false positives, but also look at the remainder of your collection for misdetections. It is as important to know what you missed as knowing what you found.
- Document, Document, Document! As you make changes to your list, keep records of each change and why it was made so that you have the information to defend your decision, if needed. **ILTA**