

# Searching with Natural Language

## Retrieving Documents on Westlaw

The Natural Language search method allows you to use plain English to retrieve relevant documents. Enter a description of your issue and Westlaw will display the documents that best match the concepts in your description. Westlaw identifies legal phrases in your description (such as *quantum meruit*, *adverse possession*, and *state of mind*), removes common terms (such as *is* and *for*), and generates variations of terms (such as *defamed*, *defaming*, and *defamation for defame*). Natural Language searching is available in most Westlaw databases.

Complete these steps to search for documents using Natural Language:

1. Formulate a description of your issue, using terms that describe its main concepts.
2. Access a database or multiple databases. The Search page is displayed.
3. At the Search page, click the **Natural Language** tab if it is not already selected.
4. Type a description of your issue in the *Search* text box and click **Search Westlaw**.

For assistance using Westlaw, call **1-800-WESTLAW** (1-800-937-8529).

For free reference materials, visit [west.thomson.com/westlaw/guides](http://west.thomson.com/westlaw/guides).

### Creating Phrases

The Natural Language search method on Westlaw uses an editorially created phrase list to automatically recognize certain phrases in your description and put them inside quotation marks. You can also create phrases by manually enclosing terms in quotation marks. For example, if you would like to include the phrase *mere continuation theory* in your description, type “**mere continuation theory**”.

The screenshot shows the Westlaw search interface. At the top, there are links for 'Custom Digest' and 'Search by Party Name'. Below that, the 'Selected Databases' section shows 'Multistate Labor and Employment - Cases (MLB-CS)' with a 'Change Database(s)' link and 'Tips'. The 'Terms and Connectors' section has two tabs: 'Terms and Connectors' and 'Natural Language', with the latter being selected and highlighted with an orange box. The search box contains the text 'do accidents caused by negligence disqualify an employee from unemployment compensation'. To the right of the search box are buttons for 'Search Westlaw' and 'Thesaurus'. Below the search box is a 'Recent Searches & Locates' dropdown menu. The 'Dates' section is set to 'Unrestricted'. A 'Require/Exclude Terms' link is also visible. At the bottom, the 'Fields' section is highlighted with an orange box and contains three text boxes labeled 'Court', 'Attorney', and 'Judge'.

Figure 1. The Natural Language tab on the Search page

### Restricting Your Search by Field

You can easily refine your Natural Language description by adding field restrictions to your search. In a case law database, for example, you can add court, attorney, and judge field restrictions. Type your terms in the *Court*, *Attorney*, or *Judge* text boxes at the bottom of the Search page.

## Adding Related Terms

You can add your own related terms to a description or you can add terms suggested by the Westlaw thesaurus.

To add your own related terms, type them in your description immediately following the terms to which they relate and enclose them in parentheses, e.g., **tree branch (limb) crossing property line (border boundary)**.

To use the Westlaw thesaurus to add related terms, follow these steps:

1. Type your description, e.g., **retaliatory discharge for age discrimination claim**, in the *Search* text box and click **Thesaurus**. The Thesaurus page is displayed.
2. From the *Terms in Search* list, select a term for which you want to see related terms.
3. To add a term to your description, select the term in the *Related Terms* list and click the **Add** button. The terms are placed in parentheses and added to your description immediately following the terms to which they relate in the *Current Search* box. To remove a related term from your description, select it in the *Related Terms* list and click the **Remove** button.
4. When you finish using the thesaurus, click **OK** to return to the Search page.

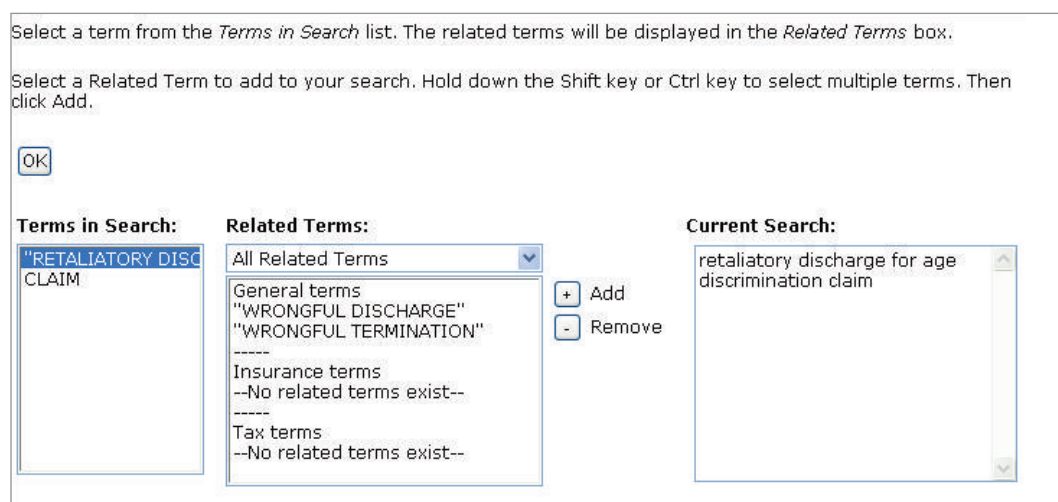


Figure 2. Thesaurus page

## Requiring and Excluding Concepts

You can specify concepts that must or must not appear in documents in your result by completing the following steps:

1. Type your Natural Language description in the *Search* text box.
2. To specify one or more terms or phrases in your description that must appear in every document in your result, click **Require/Exclude Terms**. At the next page under *Require Terms*, select the check boxes for the terms you require and specify the number of times each term must appear.
3. To omit documents from your result that contain specific terms or phrases, type the terms or phrases in the *Exclude Terms* text box.
4. When you finish requiring and excluding terms, click **OK**.
5. At the Search page, click **Search Westlaw**.