Searching Tools

Periodical databases provide tools to help you create efficient searches. Below are explanations of the various tools and techniques available to you. Please note that not all tools and techniques work in every database. Always check a database’s help screens or ask a librarian if you are not getting the results you want.

**Boolean Operators**
Allow you to expand or narrow your search by connecting search terms in mathematical ways.

**AND:** Using AND between search terms narrows the scope of your search because the results will be required to contain the words before AND after it. The more terms you connect with AND, the narrower your search will become.

*Example:* smoking AND health – will likely result in information about how smoking affects health.

**OR:** Using OR between search terms broadens the scope of your search because it allows either or both terms to be present in the results. OR is best used between synonymous or similar terms. The more terms you connect with OR, the more numerous your results will be.

*Example:* health OR nutrition – will bring up information about health, information about nutrition, and articles about health and nutrition.

**NOT:** Using NOT between search terms narrows the scope of your search by eliminating a term from your results. The more terms you eliminate by using NOT, the narrower your search will become.

*Example:* smoking NOT cancer – will result in information that discusses smoking without the mention of cancer.

[ProQuest search interface example]

This search will likely result in articles that discuss health risks other than cancer that are related to smoking and/or nicotine.
Phrase Searching
Allows you to search for phrases of 2 or more words, preventing each individual term from being searched separately. Most databases and search engines suggest using quotation marks around groups of words you'd like searched as phrases.

Examples: "health care reform" "Fourth of July" "carbon footprint"

Truncation
Allows you to search for a term and its variations by entering the first few letters of the term followed by a symbol, commonly an asterisk (*). Truncation symbols vary from database to database, so consult the help screen if the asterisk doesn't work.

Example: bicycl* retrieves the terms bicycle, bicycles, bicyclist, bicyclists

**Be careful not to put the symbol too early or too late in the word. It may become ineffective. For example, bicycles* will only retrieve that term, as no other words begin with that string of letters. bi* will retrieve many words unrelated to bicycles, such as biped, bilingual, bite, and binder.

Wildcard characters
Wildcards are used to represent 1-9 additional characters in a search term. They are useful when you are unsure of a spelling, when there are alternate spellings, or when you only know part of a term. As with truncation symbols, they may vary from database to database.

Commonly, the pound sign (#) represents a single character – exactly one letter.
Example: wom#n will retrieve records containing woman and/or women

The question mark (?) often represents any number of letters.
Example: col?r may retrieve color, colour, colonizer, colorimeter

Child abuse is one term – these two words will not be searched separately

![ProQuest](image)

This search would likely find articles concerning women and their relationships to both child abuse and therapy.