databasics

Or

Leveling Off the Database Learning Curve

University of Florida
Health Science Center Libraries
Common database functions

 ✓ Help/Guide page
 ✓ Truncation/Wildcard
 ✓ Phrase searching
 ✓ Controlled vocabulary
 ✓ Limits
 ✓ Combining searches
 ✓ History of search session
 ✓ **Links** (to electronic full-text or the library’s record of its print journals)
 ✓ Saving search strategies & results
 ✓ **Alerts**: New results sent to your email
Don’t drown in a new database!
Look for a **Help** or **User Guide** button in the upper left or right corner or the top center of the screen.
Truncation

What it does
Searches for word variations:
- therap* retrieves therapy,
  therapies, therapeutic,
  therapeutics

How to
1. Type the beginning of a search term--up to the point at which its forms/spellings differ (after the p in the therap* example above)
2. Add the database’s truncation symbol (usually *)
Databases may use different symbols for truncation.

See each database’s Help/Guide page to learn:
1. its truncation symbol
2. how many letters must precede a truncation symbol. In most databases you need 3 characters before you truncate (no *etiology for aetiology, for example.)

Over the past 2 decades, the asterisk has become nearly universal across bibliographic (library) databases as a truncation symbol. In the past, some databases used question marks and dollar signs also/instead.
Wildcards

- A WILDCARD symbol substitutes for one or sometimes no character(s) to retrieve similar words in one search. For example:
  - both woman and women
  - both American orthopedics and British orthopaedics

- Like truncation symbols, wildcard symbols vary between databases and usually cannot be used at the beginning of a search term.
Phrase Searching

• Many health ideas are expressed as phrases of two or more words.

• To ensure they’re only retrieved when adjacent without intervening words and in the order entered, place the multiword phrase in quotation marks:

  “health care”  “closed head injury”
Controlled vocabulary?
What’s that?

A “lead” or standardized term chosen to gather related terms and word forms under.

Adolescent:
• Youth
• Teen
• Teenager
• Adolescence
• Post-elementary student
• Young adult….
Controlled Vocabulary—worth the effort?

You decide!

Computer matches individual letters

vs.

Human brains process whole-sentence or whole-article meaning
Why we ♥ controlled vocabulary!!!

- Collects alternate spellings/word forms and synonyms: *therapy, therapies, treatment, treatments*

- Separates meanings of homonyms: *hearing (ear function) ≠ hearing (judicial function)*

- Judges relative importance of term in the context of whole article (only “names” the most important concepts in articles)

- Notes negating terms like *but, except, not*
“Hidden” in full view

Most databases show you exactly where to find their controlled vocabulary. They just use different names for it:
These weed out unwanted results.

Common limits:
- Language
- Publication date
- Type of publication
- Age of patient/client
Most databases allow you to combine searches of different “fields” in one search . . .

. . .or to combine previous searches with AND, OR, NOT

CINAHL

Cochrane Library
History

- Lists previous searches
- Enables you to combine previous searches.
- Lists terms and combinations you've tried in case you have to redo a search or pick up where you left off.
Connect to

- publishers’ full-text ejournals in databases

OR

- full-text ejournals in the UF libraries’ catalog
Saving Search Strategies and Results; Setting up Alerts

• Most databases enable you to save your search strategies and their results either directly from the results page or from the Search History.

• You can also set up alerts: the database will email citations of new items that fit your search parameters when they enter the database.

PubMed (My NCBI section)

CINAHL (an Ebsco database)

ERIC (a ProQuest database)
## Cast of Databases that Appeared in Examples

### Databases

**Quick picks – the most popular databases**

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<th>Databases</th>
<th>Clinical Pharmacology</th>
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<td>InCites Journal Citation Reports</td>
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