**DATABASE SEARCHING TIPS**

1. **Find the best database for the subject you are researching**
   
   You can find an appropriate database in a couple of ways. First, you can check out the Subject Guide most suited to the research you are doing.

   Or, you can check out the [Dalhousie Libraries’ A-Z list of databases](http://dal.ca.libguides.com/az.php) located at [http://dal.ca.libguides.com/az.php](http://dal.ca.libguides.com/az.php)
   
   This list can be sorted by subject!

2. **Create a list of search terms (keywords)**

   There is often more than one way to describe a topic. For example, when searching for articles about junk food, you might use words like *candy* or *confectionary* or *snacks*. If you stick to only one word or phrase to describe an idea, you may be missing out on other relevant articles. Therefore, before you start searching, try to think of a list of terms/words/phrases that capture the topic you are researching.

   A chart might be helpful. Let’s say you are searching for information on the effects of television on children. Think about words that could capture your two concepts: television and children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Television</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Check out the databases index terms

Many databases have a list of index terms. This list goes by a variety of names such as thesaurus, subject headings, MeSH terms, etc. These index terms are controlled vocabulary that the database uses to describe different subjects. When you find a relevant article, you can often click on it to find out what index terms or subject headings the database is using. This is a great way to think of more keywords, which will increase the likelihood of finding more articles relevant to your topic.

Combine terms with Boolean Operators

The Boolean Operators AND, OR, and NOT can be used to expand or narrow the focus of your search.

Use parentheses to group concepts

Like in a math equation, parentheses tell a database to prioritize the terms inside the parentheses before moving to the terms outside. For example, if you are searching for articles about children and television you could try:

(child OR children OR toddler) AND Television

This search would look for articles including any of the words child, children, or toddler, but only if they also include the term television.

Search Library Resources

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Other database searching tips and tricks

Here are some tricks that you can use along with Boolean Operators to help empower and focus your database searches:

- **Truncation (*)** can be used to tell a database to search for all words that begin with the shortened term you entered. Truncating a search term tells the database to search for all terms that begin with the truncated term.
  
  Ex. child* = (child, children, or childhood)

- **Phrase Searching ("""")** When you are looking for a specific phrase, you can place the words in **quotation marks** to tell the database that you want the terms searched together.
  
  Ex. “foreign affairs” = foreign affairs not just “foreign” or “affairs”

- **Wild cards (# or ?)** are useful for telling the database that you aren’t sure how a word should be spelled.
  
  o # is used to indicate that a character may or may not be present in the term
  o ? is used to show that the correct term could contain a variable character in that position.
  
  Ex. Colo#r = (color or colour) and neutrali?e = (neutralize or neutralise)

**Use the HELP feature if you have questions**

All database platforms have a help feature. The help feature can answer a variety of questions regarding how to use the database and how to search it more effectively.

**Create an account and log in to the database (recommended; not required)**

Most database platforms (EBSCO, ProQuest, etc.) allow you to create a **free account**. We recommend that you use your Dalhousie Email for this account.

You do not have to create an account to search a database, but creating an account and logging in before searching allows you to **save your search history and results** so that you can revisit them later.