How to save time searching databases

Truncation and wildcards

To get the best results when searching it is a good idea to include word variations, plurals and different word spellings in your search.

Most databases have features called truncation and wildcards that allow you to do this easily.

Truncation helps you find:	Examples
singular and plural word forms	• work***** finds work, work**s** • system***** finds system, system**s**
word variations (words that have the same stem or root)	• diabet***** finds diabet**ic**, diabet**ics**, diab**etes** • obes***** finds obes**e**, obes**ity**
Wildcards help you find:	**Examples**
Different word spellings	• organi**?**ation finds organi**z**ation, organi**s**ation • urbani**?**ation finds urbani**z**ation, urbani**s**ation • behavio**#**r finds both behavior, behavio**u**r

Phrase searching

If you are searching for a concept which has two or more words i.e. *global warming*, it is a good idea to keep the words together as a phrase. Some databases will search for each word individually i.e. *global* AND *warming*. This means your search will not find results that are as relevant.

Many databases have phrase searching features which help you find phrases.

Phrase searching helps you find:	Examples

two or more words together in the exact order	• Most databases use double quotes **"…"** for phrases:
	  o **"**global warming**"**
	  o **"**change management**"**
	  o **"**corporate social responsibility**"**

* If you need help planning your search before you use these database features:

Watch **Plan your search**

Read **How to Plan your search**

For further information about Library resources and services visit: www.library.unisa.edu.au/

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Quick reference guide

Different databases use a range of truncation and wildcard symbols and phrase searching features. The table below shows the use of these in a selection of key databases.

Database/platform	Truncation	Wildcard	Phrase searching
Cochrane Library	*	?	For a simple phrase e.g. back pain, use double quotes. When using * or ? add NEXT between the words (e.g. cardio* NEXT disease).
Computer Database *(via Gale Cengage)*	*	? represents one character, ?? represents two characters etc… ! represents zero or one character	Use double quotes.
EBSCOhost *e.g. Business Source Complete, ERIC, SportDiscus*	*	? represents one character # represents zero or one character	Use double quotes.
Emerald Insight	*	?	Use double quotes.
Engineering Information Village 2 *e.g. Compendex, INSPEC*	*	* represents zero or one character ? represents one character	Use double quotes.
Informit databases	*	* represents zero or one character ? represents one character	Use double quotes.
JSTOR	*	?	Use double quotes.
JustisOne	*	* represents zero or one character ? represents one character	Use double quotes.
LegalTrac *(via Gale Cengage)*	*	? represents one character, ?? represents two characters etc… ! represents zero or one character	Use double quotes.
Lexis Advance Pacific Research	* or !	*	Use double quotes.
Library Catalogue	*	?	Use double quotes.
NewsBank Newspapers	*	* represents zero or one character ? represents one character, ?? represents two characters etc…	Use double quotes.
OvidSP (Advanced Search only) *e.g. Embase, Medline, PsycINFO*	* or $	? represents zero or one letter or number	Two or more words default to a phrase.
Project MUSE	*	Not available	Use double quotes.
ProQuest *e.g. ProQuest central*	*	? represents one character, ?? represents two characters etc…	Use double quotes.
PubMed	*	Not available	Use double quotes.
ScienceDirect	*	Not available	Use double quotes.
Scopus	*	?	Use double quotes.
Trove	*	Not available	Use double quotes.
Web of Science	*	? represents one character, $ represents zero or one character	Use double quotes.
Westlaw	!	*	Use double quotes.

Tip: If something does not work properly always check the database help pages.