General search techniques

Combining search terms
Combining multiple topics in one search can be done with Boolean operators. Depending on the operator, it broadens or narrows your search results:

- **AND**
  All terms must appear in the search results

- **OR**
  One or both of the terms must appear in the search results

- **NOT**
  The terms must not appear in the search results

Masking
A wildcard, # or ? or $ (depending on the database), can replace none or one letter in spelling variations. Wildcards maximize your search results:

- behaviour

  This includes searches for behavior, behaviour.

Phrase searching
Double quotes around a phrase indicate that the specified search terms must follow each other in this exact order. Use phrase searching on established phrases only. It narrows your search and filters out irrelevant results:

- “social media”

Truncating words
Breaking off search terms is called truncating. The truncation mark replaces a part of the word in order to search for singular, plural or other endings of the term at the same time. Truncation broadens your search:

- gene*

  This search includes gene, genes, genetics, generation.

Nesting terms
It can be more efficient to nest search terms using brackets, especially during complex searches. These are used to retrieve a broad set of search results:

- swallow AND (spring OR summer)

Field searching
It is possible to search in different fields simultaneously such as title words and author name. By doing so, the search results will be fewer but more relevant:

- research ethics
- byrne

Subject search
In some databases you can use subject headings to search for literature. Subject headings are terms pre-defined by academics or algorithms. Use these headings to find relevant literature on the same topic:

- athletics

Do you need more help with your literature research?

Search terms | Structured searches | Literature management | Citing literature | Creating alerts | Databases and other information sources

The information specialists of the university library can advise and support you in searching and finding literature, economic data and legal and historical sources! For more information about the databases that fit your field go to:

https://libguides.ru.nl/subjects