# Truncation and Wildcards

healthcarelibrarians@brookes.ac.uk

## What are they and why use them?

Databases only search on what words you put in, they don’t anticipate alternative spellings, synonyms or know your context.

You need to enter all the alternative terms into the database to get all the possible articles. Use truncation and wildcards to help cut down the number of words you have to type in.

## Truncation

Truncation allows you to look for different word endings.

Truncation is usually represented by the \* symbol.

Just type the letters which are the same for all variations and then add \*

Health professional\* will find:

Health professional

Health professionals

## Use with caution…

Sometimes truncating isn’t helpful. Check the first few results which come up to see if your truncation works.

If you want to enter

comply OR complies OR compliance OR complied OR complying

You might think that Compl\* would give you all of these.

It will, but you will also get

complete OR completed OR completing OR complicated OR complimentary

This will mean you have to go through lots of irrelevant results to get to the articles you’re looking for.

## Check your terms

Take a moment to check the terms you were thinking of searching on.

Are there any places where you could add a \*, or places where it would be better to write out the words.

It usually helps to get someone else to look at it for you to help spot things you’ve missed.

Sometimes, just leaving your terms and going for a cup of tea before coming back to them helps too.

## Wildcard

Wildcards enable you to search for words which have different spellings.

If it is only one letter in the word which changes then use ?

wom?n = woman OR women

Organi?ation = organisation OR organization

## If there might be an extra letter in the word…

If there is a possibility of an extra letter in the word, then the symbol you use varies.

In CINAHL or PsycInfo use # e.g. behavio#r

In BNI use ? e.g. behavio?r

In Cochrane use \* e.g. behavio\*r

Wildcards don’t work in PubMed

You can’t use a wildcard to find a hyphenated and a non-hyphenated version of a word. You have to write out both variations

End-of-life OR end of life

## Further help

If you’re confused by the use of OR in this guide then you can look at our guide When to use AND and OR

If you’re looking for ways to narrow rather than broaden your search try our Too many results? guide on the Library Health and Social Work How to… Guides page

If you have questions you’d like to ask a librarian…

## Any Questions?

healthcarelibrarians@brookes.ac.uk

Ask for help if you need it.