

Search operators in bibliographic databases

Search operators for free-text searching

Database	Double-quotes for phrase searching	Truncation	Boolean operators	Parentheses	Automatic stemming	Proximity searching
BMJ Best Practice	Yes	No	No	No	No, but will search for some synonyms	No
BMJ Case Reports	Yes	No	AND, OR - not case-sensitive	No	No	No
Cochrane Library	Yes	Yes - symbol is *	AND, OR, NOT - not case-sensitive	Yes	Yes	NEAR (within 6 words) NEAR/X within X words NEXT next to each other in order specified
EBSCOHost	Yes	Yes - symbol is * Use # for zero or one character (e.g. p#ediatric) Use ? for single character (e.g. wom?m)	AND, OR, NOT Assume case -sensitive - local settings may allow lower-case as it can be changed in admin interface	Yes	No	N for near within X words in any order e.g. N5 W for near within X words in the same order e.g. W4
ERIC	Yes	Yes - symbol is *	AND, OR - not case-sensitive Use minus (-) to exclude terms, and plus (+) to indicate required terms	Yes	No	No

Google Scholar	Yes	No	AND, OR Case-sensitive, must be in upper case Use minus (-) to exclude terms	Yes	No	No
medRxiv	Yes, but not in combination with Boolean operators	Yes - symbol is *	AND, OR, NOT - not case-sensitive	No	Yes	No
NHS Knowledge and Library Hub	Yes Note: using double-quotes prevents the search being repeatable in further resources	Yes - symbol is * Use # for zero or one character (e.g. p#ediatric) Use ? for single character (e.g. wom?m)	AND, OR, NOT Assume case -sensitive - local settings may allow lower-case as it can be changed in admin interface	Yes	No	N for near within X words in any order e.g. N5 W for near within X words in the same order e.g. W4
Ovid	Yes Double-quotes are not necessary as Ovid treats free-text terms as phrases If using double-quotes, make sure they are "straight quotes" and not "smart quotes" if you're pasting in search terms from	Yes - symbol is * or \$ Limit to n characters e.g. child*4 Use ? for zero or one character (e.g. p?ediatric) Use # for single character (e.g. wom#n)	AND, OR, NOT - not case-sensitive	Yes	No	ADJx e.g. nursing ADJ3 education

	elsewhere					
ProQuest	Yes	<p>Yes - symbol is *</p> <p>By default, limited to 5 characters</p> <p>Use [*n] to limit to specific number of characters</p> <p>? for single character</p>	AND, OR, NOT - not case-sensitive	Yes	Limited - searches for US and UK spellings, plurals and comparators	<p>NEAR/n or N/n</p> <p>e.g. nursing NEAR/3 education</p> <p>Defaults to within 4 words without qualifier</p> <p>Use PRE/n or P/n for words in same order</p>
PubMed	<p>Yes</p> <p>If using quotes ("") they will be ignored if there are no results</p> <p>Using a hyphen between words for strict phrase searching e.g. kidney-allograft</p>	<p>Yes - symbol is *</p> <p>Using truncation turns off automatic term mapping</p>	<p>AND, OR, NOT</p> <p>Case-sensitive, must be in upper case</p>	Yes	Yes. Does automatic term mapping that will include terms under that term in the MeSH hierarchy	<p>"search terms"[field:~N]</p> <p>e.g. "nursing education"[ti:~3]</p> <p>Only available in title (ti) and title/abstract (tiab) fields.</p>
Royal Marsden Manual	Yes	Yes - symbol is *	AND, OR - not case-sensitive	Yes	No	No
TRIP database	<p>Yes, but remove hyphens from phrase</p> <p>e.g. "e learning"</p>	Sort of - symbol is *, but does seem to give some odd results	AND, OR, NOT - not case-sensitive	Yes	Yes. Also searches for synonyms	Doesn't work
UpToDate	Yes	Yes - symbol is *			Automatic synonym	

					search	
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Combining search steps in search history

Database	Combining search steps
BMJ Case Reports	No search step history available
Cochrane Library	Use form #1 and #2 Searches need to be added to the search manager to be available to combine
EBSCOHost	Use form s1 and s2
ERIC (native interface)	No search step history available
Google Scholar	No search step history available
medRxiv	No search step history available
NHS Knowledge and Library Hub	Use form s1 and s2
Ovid	Use form 1 and 2
ProQuest	Use form [s1] and [s2]
PubMed	Use form #1 and #2
TRIP database	Use form #1 and #2 Search steps can be found under the 'Recent' tab

Field searching

Database	Field searching
BMJ Case Reports	Yes, see advanced search page for options
Cochrane Library	Yes, use dropdown next to search box
EBSCOHost	Yes, use dropdown next to search box (which also gives field codes). Alternatively, to use field codes in search statement, place before term in uppercase e.g. TI "artery rupture". To search multiple fields, it is necessary to use multiple statements e.g. TI "artery rupture" OR AB "artery rupture"
ERIC	Yes, place field code and colon before search term e.g. title:"test score". No space between colon and search terms. Codes includes title:, author:, abstract:. See ERIC search help page for full list.
Google Scholar	Can use allintitle: to search all words in title only e.g. allintitle: vein rupture Can use author: to search author only e.g. author:"JP Curtis" When searching author, remove space after colon Can use source: to search within a journal e.g. source:nature. When searching source, remove space after colon
medRxiv	Yes, see advanced search page for options
NHS Knowledge and Library Hub	Yes, use dropdown next to search box (which also gives field codes) on advanced search page. Alternatively, to use field codes in search statement, place before term in uppercase e.g. TI "artery rupture"
Ovid	Yes, see 'Search Fields' for codes. To use field codes in search statement, place after term and a full-stop e.g. methotrexate.ti,ab to search title and abstract, or "physical therapy modalities".sh to search in subject headings. To search multiple fields, place a comma between field codes.
ProQuest	Yes, see Advanced Search page for dropdown (which also gives field codes). Alternatively, click 'Field Codes' on Advanced Search page for a full list for the database. Alternatively, to use field codes in search statement place before term without a space e.g. ti,ab,tx(methotrexate) to search title and abstract, or mjmesh(physical therapy modalities) to search in major MeSH headings. To search multiple fields, place a comma between field codes.

	<p>TIAB is available to search title and abstract, TIABSU for title, abstract and subject and NOFT for everything except the full-text. [note: as of October 2022, TIAB in ProQuest is not working as it should and gives different results to searching TI or AB. ProQuest are working on correcting it]</p>
PubMed	<p>Yes, use dropdown next to search box on advanced search page.</p> <p>Alternatively, to use field codes in search statement, place after the term e.g. kidney allograft [tiab] to search as a phrase or covid-19 [ti] vaccine [ti] to search multiple terms not as a phrase.</p> <p>A list of field tags is available at https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/help/#search-tags</p>
TRIP database	<p>Can search in title or document. See advanced search page for options</p>

Thesaurus searching

Although an interface may offer thesaurus searching, not all databases in that interface will necessarily offer it, and some will not offer options such as explode, major concept, and subheadings.

Database	Accessing thesaurus	Direct entry for known terms
Cochrane Library	Yes, Cochrane uses MeSH and this can be accessed from Advanced Search > Medical Terms (MeSH)	
EBSCOHost	Yes, select 'Suggest Subject Terms' on Advanced Search screen	Exploded, major concept: MM "Emergency Medical Services+" Exploded, not major concept: MH "Emergency Medical Services+" Not exploded, not major concept: MH "Emergency Medical Services" To add a subheading, place the two-letter code(s) at the end separated by a slash: (MH "Methotrexate/PO/AE")
ERIC	Yes, click 'Thesaurus' tab on main search screen	descriptor:"Stuttering" ERIC does not offer explode, major concept or subheadings in its thesaurus
NHS Knowledge and Library Hub	No, due to the multi-database search. It is possible to do a field search within subject headings, but terms will differ between databases	

Ovid	Yes, tick 'Map Term to Subject Heading' on Advanced Search screen	<p>Exploded, major concept: exp *Emergency Medical Services/</p> <p>Exploded, not major concept: exp Emergency Medical Services/</p> <p>Not exploded, not major concept: Emergency Medical Services/</p> <p>To add a subheading, place the two-letter code(s) at the end separated by a comma: Methotrexate/ae, po</p>
ProQuest	Yes, select 'Thesaurus' on Advanced Search screen	<p>Exploded, major concept: MJMESH.EXACT.EXPLODE("Emergency Medical Services")</p> <p>Exploded, not major concept: MESH.EXACT.EXPLODE("Emergency Medical Services")</p> <p>Not exploded, not major concept: MESH.EXACT("Emergency Medical Services")</p> <p>For databases other than Medline, substitute MAINSUBJECT for MESH: MJMAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE("Emergency Medicine")</p> <p>It is possible to enter subheadings directly, but it is not recommended – use the Thesaurus system</p>

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