Tips for effective searching

However your search is formatted, using Boolean operators and other search techniques allows you to find the results you need. Our simple guide will help you create an effective search strategy, making it much easier and faster to find the results you want to see, while excluding the ones you don't.

For more in depth information, our Best Practice guide will show you how to be sure that your searches are always comprehensive, systematic, and unbiased.

> **Tip:** The IFIS Best Practice guide can be found at
> ifis.org/literature-searching-best-practice/

Alternative spellings and variations

Ensuring that your search doesn't exclude relevant results because of differences in spelling or variations for the same term is very important. Here are some of the easiest ways to improve your search.

Phrase searching

Putting two or more words inside quotation marks will ensure that those words appear together as the phrase. E.g. "food safety"

Truncating words

The beginning of a word, followed by * will return variations of that word .E.g. nutri* will include nutrition, nutrients, nutrigenetics, etc.

Alternative spelling

Using wildcard symbols (#, $, ?) within words covers spelling variations. E.g. organi?ation will include organisation or organization.

You can combine these devices, e.g. "brewer* yeast" will bring back results for "brewer yeast", "brewer's yeast" and "brewers yeast", three variations which may appear in the literature.

> **Tip:** check the help section of each database for specific guidance on wildcard symbols
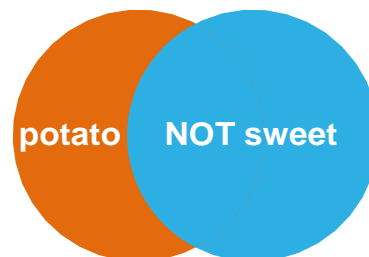
Boolean operators

Boolean operators, e.g. **AND**, **OR**, **NOT**, are used to construct your search by combining words and connecting terms.

Use **AND** to link different concepts. This will only return results that include **both** search terms, so you know that your results will include both concepts.

Use **OR** to connect variations of a concept. This will return results that include **either** terms. Unless you are running a staged search (see below), always put your **OR** terms inside brackets.

Use **NOT** to eliminate all results containing a specific word. This will return results including your first term, but will **exclude** anything including your second term.

chocolate AND armoa

("shelf life" OR spoilage)

potato **NOT sweet**

Combining searches

Some databases let you split up a search into stages, where you search one element at a time, and then combine them with Boolean operators. A search strategy might look like this:

* indicates a truncated keyword

AND combines concepts

1   child*
2   infant
3   toddler
4   1 OR 2 OR 3
5   milk
6   breast*
7   formula
8   5 OR 6 OR 7
9   4 AND 8

OR combines synonyms

In other databases, there is no option to use a staged search, so you might type the same search like this:

(Child* OR infant OR toddler) AND (milk OR breast* OR formula)

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food and health information