

# DATABASE SEARCHING TIPS



## Find the best database for the subject you are researching

You can find an appropriate database in a couple of ways. First, you can check out the Subject Guide most suited to the research you are doing.

**Search Library Resources**

Basic Search | Books | Articles | Databases | e-Journals | Subject Guides | Archives

Basic Search

enter search terms here

**Quick Links**

[Ask Us](#) | [Document Delivery](#) | [IT Helpdesk](#) | [Software Downloads](#) | [Study Room Booking](#) | [Subject Guides](#)

Or, you can check out the **Dalhousie Libraries' A-Z list of databases** located at <http://dal.ca.libguides.com/az.php>  
This list can be sorted by subject!



## Create a list of search terms (keywords)

There is often more than one way to describe a topic. For example, when searching for articles about junk food, you might use words like *candy* or *confectionary* or *snacks*. If you stick to only one word or phrase to describe an idea, **you may be missing out on other relevant articles**. Therefore, before you start searching, try to think of a list of terms/words/phrases that capture the topic you are researching.

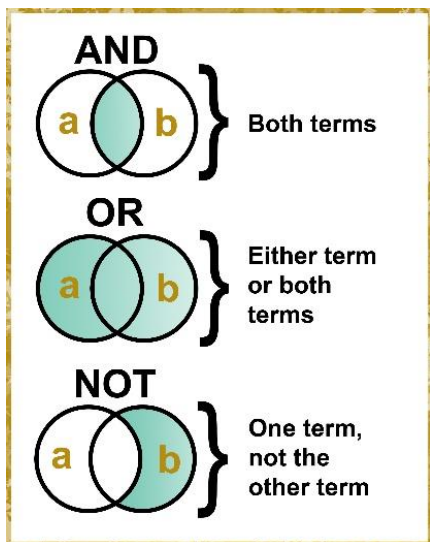
A chart might be helpful. Let's say you are searching for information on the effects of television on children. Think about words that could capture your two concepts: television and children.

Children	Television
Child	Television
Children	TV
Toddler	



## Check out the databases index terms

Many databases have a list of index terms. **This list goes by a variety of names such as thesaurus, subject headings, MeSH terms, etc.** These index terms are controlled vocabulary that the database uses to describe different subjects. When you find a relevant article, you can often click on it to find out what index terms or subject headings the database is using. This is a great way to think of more keywords, which will **increase the likelihood of finding more articles** relevant to your topic.



## Combine terms with Boolean Operators



The **Boolean Operators AND, OR, and NOT** can be used to expand or narrow the focus of your search.



## Use parentheses to group concepts

Like in a math equation, **parentheses** tell a database **to prioritize the terms inside the parentheses** before moving to the terms outside. For example, if you are searching for articles about children and television you could try:

(child OR children OR toddler) AND Television

This search would look for articles including any of the words **child, children, or toddler**, but only if they also include the term **television**.

The screenshot shows a search interface titled "Search Library Resources". It has several tabs: "Basic Search", "Books", "Articles", "Databases", "e-Journals", "Subject Guides", and "Archives". The "Articles" tab is selected and circled in red. Below the tabs is a search input field containing the query "(child OR children OR toddler) AND Television". A search button with a magnifying glass icon is to the right of the input field.

## 6 Other database searching tips and tricks

Here are some tricks that you can use along with Boolean Operators to help empower and focus your database searches:

- **Truncation (\*)** can be used to tell a database to search for all words that begin with the shortened term you entered. Truncating a search term tells the database to search for all terms that begin with the truncated term.

Ex. child\* = (child, children, or childhood)

- **Phrase Searching ("")** When you are looking for a specific phrase, you can place the words in **quotation marks** to tell the database that you want **the terms searched together**.

Ex. "foreign affairs" = foreign affairs not just "foreign" or "affairs"

- **Wild cards (# or ?)** are useful for telling the database that you **aren't sure how a word should be spelled**.
  - # is used to indicate that a character may or may not be present in the term
  - ? is used to show that the correct term could contain a variable character in that position.

Ex. Colo#r = (color or colour) and neutral?e = (neutralize or neutralise)

## Use the HELP feature if you have questions

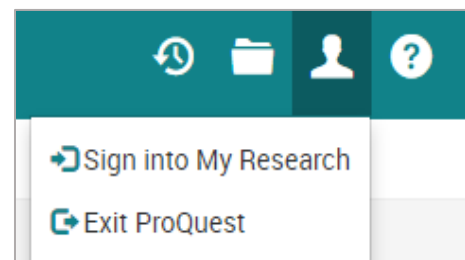
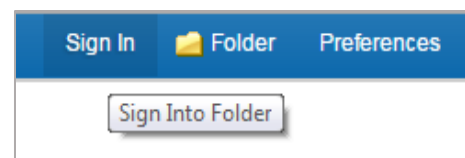
All database platforms have a help feature. The help feature can answer a variety of questions regarding how to use the database and how to search it more effectively.



## Create an account and log in to the database (recommended; not required)

Most database platforms (EBSCO, ProQuest, etc.) allow you to create a **free account**. We recommend that you use your Dalhousie Email for this account.

You do not have to create an account to search a database, but creating an account and logging in before searching allows you to **save your search history and results** so that you can revisit them later.



Last updated July 2016

