

NIH Library Tip Sheet: Truncation and Wildcard Symbols

This tip sheet describes frequently used symbols that can help improve information retrieval from databases available via the NIH Library.

Truncation symbols may be used to find all terms that begin with a given root word. Different symbols are used to truncate terms in the following databases:

PubMed[®]

Place an asterisk (*) at the end of a term to search for all terms that begin with that root word.

Example(s):

*bacter** will find all terms that begin with the letters bacter; e.g., bacteria, bacterium, bacteriophage, etc.

- 1) Phrases that include a space in a word after the asterisk will NOT be included; for instance, "infection*" includes "infections," but not "infection control."
- 2) Truncation turns off automatic term mapping, including the automatic explosion of a MeSH term. For example, heart attack* will not map to the MeSH terms Myocardial Infarction, Myocardial Stunning, etc.

Scopus[®]

Use an asterisk (*) to replace multiple or zero characters anywhere in a word. A question mark (?) acts as a wildcard for a single letter.

Example(s):

tocopherol* will find all terms that end with tocopherol; e.g., a-tocopherol, v-tocopherol, etc. It also works at the end of a word; e.g., *behave will find behave, behavior, behavioral, etc.

wom?n finds woman or women.

ISI Web of Science[®]

Use the asterisk (*), question mark (?), and dollar sign (\$) to search for variants of words.

Example(s):

*chemi** will find all terms that begin with the letters chemi; e.g., chemistry, chemical, chemist, chemists, etc.

dermatos?s will find terms that consist of the specified letters with any single letter in the place of the question mark; e.g., dermatosis or dermatoses.

colo\$r will find terms that consist of the specified letters with any single letter or zero in the place of the dollar sign; e.g., color or colour.

EMBASE®

Use a question mark (?) or asterisk (*) to search for variants of words.

Example(s):

*behav** will find behave, behavior, behavioral, behaviour, behavioural, etc.

*wom*n* will find woman and women.

sulf?nyl will find terms that consist of the specified letters with any single letter in the place of the question mark; e.g., sulfonyl or sulfinyl.

PsycINFO®

Use an asterisk (*) for unlimited truncation of search terms.

Example(s):

*disease** will retrieve disease, diseases, diseased, etc.

CINAHL and Agricola

These databases both allow the use of the asterisk (*) for truncation and the question mark (?) or pound sign (#) for wildcards.

Example(s):

*comput** to find the words computer or computing.

ne?t to find citations containing neat, nest, or next. This method does not find net because the wildcard replaces a single character.

colo#r to find all citations containing color or colour. This finds all citations of the word that appear with or without the extra character. When using the pound/hash (#) wildcard, plurals and possessives of that term are not searched.

Last Modified: November 2013