Choosing your keyword search terms

Here is a search scenario:

What are the effects of exercise on Diabetes Type 2?

You will need to identify the main keywords or key concepts from your research question:

- Exercise
- Diabetes Type 2

You will then need to think about synonyms for your keywords.

For example, in this case – what type of exercise are you interested in? Searching just on the word exercise will not find studies that are specifically about walking, swimming, running, cycling etc. For this example we’re going to assume we are interested in swimming and walking.

You will also need to think of any abbreviations that might be used or different names for the same condition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Synonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Exercises, exercising, swim, swims, swimming, walk, walks, walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes Type 2</td>
<td>Diabetes Mellitus Type 2, Type 2 Diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus, Type II Diabetes, Type II Diabetes Mellitus, T2DM, T2D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: If you are looking into older Diabetes Type 2 research then you might need to think about terms that were previously used for the condition, e.g. non-insulin dependent diabetes, late onset diabetes etc.

Search strategy tips & tricks

**Using truncation**

If you want to search on the plural, singular and other variations of the same word you can use truncation:

exercise* = will find exercise, exercises, exercising, exercised

Do not truncate too early in a word – e.g. exer* = would find the above but also excercise, exergonic, exertion, and other words you are not interested in.

The most common truncation symbol is the asterisk* but some databases use different symbols – check the database help pages to be sure.
Using wildcards

Wildcards are useful when you have British and American spellings for words. A wildcards search will allow you to replace one letter in a search term:

randomi?ed = randomised or randomized

beHAVieur?r = behaviour or behavior

Databases use different wildcard symbols – check the database help pages.

Phrase searching

Normally when you put two words into a database search it will find those two words anywhere in the title/abstract/keywords etc.:

It will do a AND search = diabetes AND mellitus

If you want to force the database to do a phrase search then enclose it in “speech marks”

“diabetes mellitus” = those words next to each other, in that order

Proximity (Adjacency) Searching

Finds one keyword within a specified number of words of the other, in any order:

Diabetes ADJ4 “Type 2” = will find Diabetes within four words of Type 2

i.e. this will find Diabetes Type 2, Diabetes Mellitus Type 2, Type 2 Diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus

This type of searching is particularly useful when you have a number of phrases that may be used to describe the same thing, as with the example above.

Databases use different proximity operators (ADJ, NEAR, N) – check the database help pages.

If you have any questions or need any help please contact us via librarians@le.ac.uk.