Biology Literature Research (BioLitRes) 101

TRUNCATION AND WILDCARDS

In many bibliographic databases, online catalogs, and search engines it is possible to refine searches using a technique called 'truncation.' Truncation allows you to search for variant forms of a word as a single search concept. Variations of words in keyword searches can be searched simply by adding or replacing characters at the ends, beginning, or middle of the word with a truncation symbol, also known as a 'wildcard.' This wildcard "stands in" for the part of the word that may have variations. Common truncation symbols included the *,#,$, and ?.

microb*	bacteri*	behavio*r	disrupt*r
microbes microbiology microbial microbacteria microbiologist microbiologists	bacteria bacterium bacterial	behavior behaviour	disruptor disrupter

Some databases may even use more than one of these symbols with specific criteria for their use. For instance, the symbol ! is used in the following example to illustrate how a search engine truncates a single character in a word

WOM!N will retrieve WOMAN and WOMEN

Be careful not to truncate too far, or you will retrieve unrelated words. For instance truncating a word to gen* to retrieve topics related to genetics and genomics will also pick up many words that are totally unrelated.

Gen*	labor*
Will pick up useful variants … genome genomics gene genotype genetic genetics …as well as unrelated ones divergence genera genus GenBank genera intergenic	Will pick up useful variants … laboratory laboratorial laboratories laboratoire laboratório laboratori laboratorium laboraroty (even picks up misspellings!) … as well as unrelated ones labor [intensive] labor [and delivery] laborious

Warning: Each search engine has a slightly different set of grammar rules for writing truncated queries; learn about those rules when getting ready to enter your query into the search engine.

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