

Searching with Keywords

Entering an entire sentence into a database search box will seldom produce the best results. Even though database search engines are getting “smarter,” it’s best to

- identify the important terms and concepts in your research question. In this case, “organic,” “fruits or vegetables,” “healthier” and “conventionally-grown.”
- determine the best keywords to represent those concepts. These may be the same as the terms used in the research question or they may be root words or synonyms.
- add a truncation symbol to the end of a root word to allow the search engine to retrieve materials with the same root word with various endings, and
- join these keywords into a Boolean search string using the operative words AND and OR

Or between terms will retrieve articles with either term. Place parentheses around terms joined by OR.

AND between terms will retrieve articles that include all of those terms.

This search string will require that each article in the result list has some form of the word “organic” and either the term “fruit” or “vegetable” in singular or plural form, as well as some form of the words “health” and either conventional or traditional.

Enter this search string into the database to retrieve a reasonable result list of articles on topic for this research question.

The first article in this list could be weeded from the list by applying one more Boolean operator to the search string. Adding “NOT bacteria” will eliminate that record and any others containing that term from the list.