

Better Searching Using Truncation

Let's say you are researching farming, but also want sources on farmers and farms. You could do a separate search for each term, or you could do one search and use the Boolean operator OR between each word, for example farming OR farms OR farmers.

That's not very efficient though. By using truncation, you can search for all the variations in a word without typing them all in. Truncation uses a symbol to find variants of a word in your searches, for example farm*.

The truncation symbol in Omni and many of the Library's databases is the asterisk *. If I search Omni using librar*, my results will include anything with library, libraries, librarians, and any other words that have 'librar' as their root.

Truncation is helpful when searching for:

- variations of a word with the same root
- singular and plural forms at the same time
- words with varying spellings

Put the truncation symbol after the common root of the words, where the spellings begin to vary. For example, library, libraries and librarians all have the root librar.

You can also put the truncation symbol in the middle of a word to replace letters, for example col*r to get both the British colour and the American color.

Be careful selecting the word root to search with. If it's too short or generic, you could end up with lots of variations you don't expect. Searching for canad* will give you Canada and Canadian. But searching for can* will also give you cancer, cannabis and candidate. For truncation to work well, the root you use needs to be distinct enough to give you relevant results.

The truncation symbol in Omni and many Library databases is an asterisk sign *. Truncation symbols are not standard though. Other symbols include a hashtag #, question mark ?, and dollar sign \$. To see which symbol is used in your database, check the help files.

Google and some other search tools do truncation for you. When you search you automatically get variant endings and spellings of words in your results, e.g. child and children. Truncation symbols don't work in these tools. If you want to search for a specific word without the variants, put it in quotation marks, "child".

If you have any questions, please ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.