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## Combining search results

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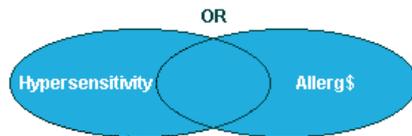
### Combine

How would you combine these elements / sets together?

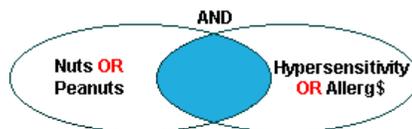
Once you have searched for each term and created separate sets, the next step is to combine them using the operators **AND** and **OR**:

Hypersensitivity (MeSH) OR allerg\$  
(textword)

Will search for references with **either** hypersensitivity as a subject heading **or** for references containing the stem 'allerg-', **or** for references containing both:



Once sets have been created for each concept, they must then be combined using **AND**:



Here the set representing *Nuts* or its alternatives is combined with the set representing *hypersensitivity* or its alternatives, to create the intersection between the two i.e. only references covering **both** concepts together.

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## Refining & Limiting search results

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### Refining search results

If you have *too few* results consider broadening your search by:

- Using additional synonyms / alternatives
- Using broader subject headings in the thesaurus or explode subject headings
- Including all subheadings with MeSH terms
- Combining MeSH and free text terms

If you have *too many* results consider narrowing your search by:

- Using MeSH terms only
- Using specific terms
- Using the focus option to restrict references where the subject heading is the main point of the article
- Using specific subheadings with MeSH terms

### Limits

Most databases enable you to limit to language, year and publication type. Some allow you to limit by gender, human or animal, age group, latest month etc.

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## Introduction to Literature Searching

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## Planning your search

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Before searching a database you need to do some preparation and decide on a search strategy.

Searching techniques have the same basic rules for any topic you are researching.

### Think

What are you trying to retrieve information about?

Take time to consider the exact information that you need. What or who is being addressed? What words describe the subject?

### Analyse

What are the key elements of the topic?

Can you be broad or does the search need to be very specific. Is it the intervention or exposure being considered? Are you making a comparison or looking for clinical outcomes?

### Synonyms

Can these key elements be described in another way? Are there associated terms?

It is important to remember that the key medical databases are American so you may need to take this into consideration as many words have different spellings, e.g. *British Orthopaedics* V *American Orthopedics*

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## Conducting your search

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### Thesaurus / MeSH searching

Medical Databases such as Medline use a thesaurus of controlled subject headings, MeSH, to index articles. Each article is assigned particular MeSH terms depending on its content.

MeSH searching improves consistency in searching so that you will retrieve relevant material and by standardising terminology / spelling.

You can also use MeSH searching to look at more specific headings within the subject you have chosen. This is called exploding. You can then decide whether to search broadly or use the list of options.

### Textword searching

If your search topic is not matched with an appropriate subject heading you can search for your topic as a textword. The database will search for the word in the title or abstract field for an exact match of the term. This method often increases the amount of irrelevant results, particularly if the search word is a frequently used term e.g. 'break', would retrieve information on a fracture, a holiday or interruption. However, it is useful when searching for an uncommon subject.

### Truncation / Wildcards

Using truncation is an easy way to search for different spellings or plurals of words.

Databases use a symbol for truncation searching, the most common are an asterisk (\*) or dollar sign (\$). E.g. Pharmac\$ will find Pharmacy, Pharmacology, Pharmaceutical

Using a wildcard symbol can also allow for spelling variations e.g. wom\$n will retrieve woman and women.

**Remember that there is no right or wrong searching method.**

**You can use these methods individually or together depending on the topic you researching and how much time you have.**

### Training Sessions

The library offers a range of training on using the healthcare databases and other information skills training.

To suit your preferred learning style, the training is available via e-learning or in person with an experienced librarian.

For more information or to book a session, please contact the library

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