How do I use advanced search techniques in CINAHL?

There are a number of techniques you can use to improve the thoroughness of your searches. The following information explains how some of these techniques operate in CINAHL.

Singular v plural, truncation, wildcards, phrases and hyphenated words

Singular v plural

- When you search using a singular form of a word, the plural and possessive forms are also retrieved. A search for nurse, for example, finds nurse, nurses, nurse’s or nurses’.
- Warning – this doesn’t apply when the plural form is spelled differently, so child, for example does not also find children.

Truncation

- Truncation is also known as “stemming”. You can use it to search for a term and variant spellings of that term, by substituting the letters at the end of the word for an asterisk (*). Your search then finds every word that begins with the letters you have entered.
  For example, therap* will retrieve therapy, therapies, therapist, therapists or therapeutic.

Wildcards

- A wildcard is a special character that you can insert into the middle of a word to replace a letter or a number of letters. You can replace one character with ?, for example, tend?nitis finds tendonitis or tendinitis.
- Where an alternative spelling may contain an extra character, you can find both versions using #, which is useful when searching for English and American spellings. Colo#, for example, finds color or colour.
- Warning - when using the # symbol, plural and possessive forms of that word are not searched for as they are by default when you use the singular form. This means that searching for colour also finds colours (and color also finds colors), but colo#r finds only color or colour.
- Warning - wildcards cannot be combined with truncation in the same term, so that a search for p#edatric* would be the same as a search for p*.

Phrase searching

- Use quotation marks when you want to find an exact phrase. “Exercise therapy” for example, will find documents where those words appear next to each other and in the same order. Whereas, exercise therapy without the quotation marks will find documents that contain both words within five words of each other and in any order.
- Warning - the use of quotation marks means that only the exact form of words is searched. Plural and possessive forms are not searched by default, as they are when
quotation marks are not used. **Case study**, for example, will find **case** within five words of **study** or **studies** (so will also find **case studies**), but “**case study**” will only find that specific phrase. You can use truncation within the quotation marks to find the singular and plural forms, so “**case stud**” will find “**case study**” or “**case studies**”.

**Hyphenated words**
- If you enter hyphenated words in a search, you will automatically find results for both the hyphenated and non-hyphenated forms. A search for **well-being**, for example, also finds “**well being**”.
- **Warning** – if the same term also occurs as a single word you will need to search for that version separately. A search for **well-being OR wellbeing**, for example, would find **well-being**, “**well being**” or **wellbeing**.