

## How To Create a Search String

### What is a Search String?

A **search string** is the combination of text, numbers and symbols that are entered into a search engine to refine a query. These characters may include keywords, numbers and operators.

### What are the components of a Search String?

A **search operator** or **boolean operator** is used in a query to broaden or narrow the focus of the research. Multiple search operators may be combined in a search string to further define a query. Some examples include:

- **AND** is used to relate key terms by indicating that results must contain both the word/phrase preceding and following it.
- **OR** is used to retrieve results containing each term separately, as well as both terms together. Brackets are used to enclose synonyms linked by the OR operator when used in conjunction with the AND operator.
- **NOT** is used to exclude terms/concepts from search results.

Using a **site operator** will yield results from only certain organizations/institution to focus your search. For example, searching *site:McMaster.ca research* will yield results about research only from the McMaster website.

Inserting **quotations** around your string of words retrieves the specific phrase in the results. For example, searching *"Big Data & Geriatric Models of Care"* will only yield results that include the exact phrase in quotations.

| EXAMPLE   |   |                      |                            |
|---|---|----------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>STEP 1</b><br>Identify the question                          | Does physical activity improve the overall health of children?  |                      |                            |
| <b>STEP 2</b><br>Break down into key concepts                   | Physical Activity   | Health               | Children                   |
| <b>STEP 3</b><br>Create a list of synonyms for each search term | Exercise, Sports  | Well-Being           | Child, Youth               |
| <b>STEP 4</b><br>Identify Operators/ Modifiers                  | Physical activity OR exercise OR sports   | Health OR well-being | Children OR child OR youth |
| <b>Search String</b>  | (Physical activity OR exercise OR sports) AND (Health OR well-being) AND (Children OR child OR youth) NOT adult |                      |                            |