

# Improving Bibliographic Database Search Results

**Note:** reading the help screens within a database can be very instructive and can provide specific details for search options that may improve your search results. There are many advanced and/ or specialized ways of searching each particular database.

**If your database search produces:**

No Citations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check for misspellings</li><li>• Check for terms that are unlikely to be used by an author</li><li>• Check for terms that are too specific</li><li>• Check for incorrect or missing field terms/ limiters</li><li>• Ask yourself, if you can expect to find articles with these terms or these combination of terms in the title, abstract, or subject headings</li><li>• Check your assumptions (e.g. are you in the right database)</li><li>• Also try techniques listed under "too few records"</li></ul>
Too Few Citations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drop the use of multi-word phrases and use AND between words instead</li><li>• Decrease the use of the AND operator or the number of concepts searched</li><li>• Increase the number of synonyms or alternatives for a term (combined with OR)</li><li>• Use the scientific name and the common name (e.g. "wolves or canis lupus"; "prozac or fluoxetine")</li><li>• Use variant spellings (i.e. British variants - e.g. "color or colour"; "behavior or behaviour", etc.)</li><li>• Use truncation (*) at the appropriate place in terms to pick up variant endings (e.g. ecolog*)</li><li>• Use a search term appropriate to the database you're searching (subject headings/ descriptors)</li><li>• Use a broader search term; use a thesaurus for the database or subject</li><li>• Search earlier or more years of the database</li><li>• Try searching a different database</li></ul>
Too Many Citations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decrease the number of synonyms by choosing the most specific subject headings or the most significant/relevant keyword</li><li>• Increase the number of search concepts (with AND)</li><li>• Do not search by full text (i.e. change the field limiter to keyword)</li><li>• Limit your search by field, e.g. restrict your search to terms found only in the title of the article</li><li>• Limit your search (to peer reviewed/ refereed articles, or to articles in english, etc.)</li><li>• Limit your search by time period to the last five years</li><li>• Exclude less relevant concepts with NOT</li></ul>