

Search Effectively with Phrase Searching and Wildcards

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Improve Your Search Results

Getting good results when searching databases depends a great deal on how you set up your search.

By using effective search techniques, you can find sources that are relevant to your topic and save yourself time!

In this tutorial you will learn how to enhance your searching by using two advanced search techniques: **phrase searching** and **wildcards**.



Phrase Searching vs. Keyword Searching

Many databases use **keyword searching** as their default search method. This means that results will be displayed if they contain the desired keywords no matter which order they appear in.

Phrase searching only displays results that contain the keywords in the particular order they are searched. Phrase searching is usually enabled by putting quotation marks around a set of keywords.



This example using the ScienceDirect database will show the results found when doing a keyword search for **community economic development**.

ScienceDirect Journals & Books ? Register Sign in

Advanced Search

[Search tips ?](#)

Find articles with these terms

In this journal or book title

Year(s)

Author(s)

Author affiliation

Volume(s)

Issue(s)

Page(s)



This keyword search returns **478,173** results. Let's examine those results more closely.

The screenshot shows the ScienceDirect search interface. At the top left is the ScienceDirect logo. On the right, there are links for 'Journals & Books', a help icon, a library icon, and buttons for 'Register' and 'Sign in'. The search bar contains the text 'community economic development' and a search icon. Below the search bar, there is a link for 'Advanced search'. The search results are displayed in a list format, sorted by 'relevance | date'. The first result is a research article titled 'Community resilience, Corporate Social Responsibility and local economic development: The case of coal mining in India' by Ajay Kumar, Jyotirani Gupta, and Niladri Das. The second result is 'Balancing economic development and environmental responsibility: Perceptions from communities of garimpeiros in the Brazilian Amazon' by L. Massaro, J. Calvimontes, and M. de Theije. On the left side, there are options to 'Set search alert', 'Refine by' (Subscribed journals), and 'Years' (2024 (1), 2023 (10,460), 2022 (41,556)). The number '478,173 results' is highlighted with a red box and an arrow pointing to it from the text above.

ScienceDirect

Journals & Books ? Register Sign in

Find articles with these terms

community economic development

Advanced search

478,173 results

Set search alert

Refine by:

Subscribed journals

Years

2024 (1)

2023 (10,460)

2022 (41,556)

Show more

Download selected articles Export sorted by relevance | date

Research article Full text access

1 **Community** resilience, Corporate Social Responsibility and local **economic development**: The case of coal mining in India
The Extractive Industries and Society, 5 July 2022, ...
Ajay Kumar, Jyotirani Gupta, Niladri Das
View PDF Abstract Extracts Figures Export

Research article Open access

2 **Balancing economic development** and environmental responsibility: Perceptions from **communities** of garimpeiros in the Brazilian Amazon
Resources Policy, 17 October 2022, ...
L. Massaro, J. Calvimontes, ... M. de Theije
View PDF Abstract Extracts Figures Export



Research article ● Open access
 3 Decomposing socio-economic inequalities in antenatal care utilisation in 12 Southern African Development Community countries
 SSM - Population Health, 16 December 2021, ...
 Keolebogile M. Selebano, John E. Ataguba
[View PDF](#) [Abstract](#) [Extracts](#) [Figures](#) [Export](#)

Research article ● Full text access
 4 Social and economic challenges to community-based sea cucumber mariculture development in New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea
 Marine Policy, 25 March 2020, ...
 Cathy Hair, Simon Foale, ... Paul C. Southgate
[View PDF](#) [Abstract](#) [Extracts](#) [Figures](#) [Export](#)

Research article ● Full text access
 5 How community-level social and economic developments have changed the patterns of substance use in a transition economy?
 Health & Place, July 2017, ...
 Xiaozhao Y. Yang
[View PDF](#) [Abstract](#) [Extracts](#) [Figures](#) [Export](#)

Research article ● Full text access
 6 The role of piped water supplies in advancing health, economic development, and gender equality in rural communities
 Social Science & Medicine, 14 January 2021, ...
 James C. Winter, Gary L. Darmstadt, Jennifer Davis
[View PDF](#) [Abstract](#) [Extracts](#) [Figures](#) [Export](#)

Research article ● Open access
 7 How third places foster and shape community cohesion, economic development and social capital: The case of pubs in rural Ireland
 Journal of Rural Studies, October 2017, ...
 Ignazio Cabras, Matthew P. Mount
[View PDF](#) [Abstract](#) [Extracts](#) [Figures](#) [Export](#)

As you can see, the search retrieved articles that have the keywords **community**, **economic**, and **development** in them.

However, the words aren't always in the proper order and the articles are not necessarily about the unique concept of **community economic development**.



Now let's try the same search, but this time as a phrase search. To do this, place quotation marks around the keywords: **“community economic development”**



ScienceDirect Journals & Books ?  Register Sign in

Advanced Search

[Search tips ?](#)

Find articles with these terms



This phrase search returns 485 results. Notice that the results are all focused on the specific topic.

The screenshot shows the ScienceDirect search interface. At the top left is the ScienceDirect logo. On the top right, there are links for 'Journals & Books', a help icon, and buttons for 'Register' and 'Sign in'. The search bar contains the text '"community economic development"' and has a search icon to its right. Below the search bar, there is a link for 'Advanced search'. On the left side, there is a '485 results' box, a 'Set search alert' link, and a 'Refine by' section with options for 'Subscribed journals' and 'Years' (2023 (11), 2022 (35), 2021 (35), and a 'Show more' link). On the right side, there are options to 'Download selected articles' and 'Export', and a 'sorted by relevance | date' link. The search results list includes: 1. 'Community Economic Development' from the 'International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, 2001, ...' by E. J. Blakely, R. J. Milano, with options for 'Abstract', 'Figures', and 'Export'. 2. 'Second Growth: Community Economic Development in Rural British Columbia' by Markey, S., Pierce, J.T., Vodden, K., Roseland, M. UBC Press, Vancouver (2005) (360pp., CDN \$34.95pbk, ISBN:0-7748-1059-9), from the 'Journal of Rural Studies, January 2007, ...' by Kenneth C. Bessant, with options for 'View PDF', 'Figures', and 'Export'. An orange arrow points from the text '485 results' in the first paragraph to the '485 results' box in the screenshot.



Keyword and Phrase Searching Review

- The way a database treats phrase searching can have a significant effect on your search results.
- Some databases do phrase searching by default. This means if you search for a string of words, the database will automatically search for articles where the words appear side-by-side in the order you type them.
- Some databases will automatically search for words as they appear anywhere in the article, and not necessarily side-by-side.
- You can check a database's **Help** feature to find out if it uses phrase searching and how to do a phrase search.



Wildcards (Truncation)

Wildcards (sometimes called truncation) allow you to search for variations of the same word at the same time.

Wildcard or truncation symbols stand in for one or more letters in a word.

Different databases use different wildcard symbols. The most common symbols used are:

*** , ? , \$, # , and !**



Wildcards are useful when searching for:

- Both singular and plural versions of a word:

Penguin* → Penguin
Penguins

- Words that start the same but end differently:

Farm* → Farm
Farms
Farmer
Farmers
Farming

- Words that can be spelled differently or that you are unsure of how to spell:

Trave*ing → Traveling
Travelling



Wildcards (Truncation) Example

Let's try to find articles about **sustainable fishing**.

We could use the keywords **sustainable** AND **fishing** in our search, but that would mean we may miss articles that include the words **fisheries**, **sustainability**, or **fish**.



Using the GEOBASE database, the search terms **fish** and **sustainability** have been truncated to **fish*** and **sustainab***. This will allow for more of the possible keywords to be covered in one search, rather than doing multiple searches for every variation of each keyword.

The screenshot displays the Engineering Village search interface. At the top left is the Elsevier logo and the text "Engineering Village". On the right side of the top bar are navigation links: "Search", "Search History" (with a 0 notification), "Alerts" (with a 0 notification), "Selected records" (with a 0 notification), and "More". There are also help and user icons.

The main search area has a green background. It features a "Quick search:" section with two search boxes. The first box is set to "All fields" and contains the text "fish*". The second box is preceded by "AND" and is also set to "All fields", containing the text "sustainab*". To the right of the second box are a close button (X), a search button (magnifying glass), and a help icon (question mark).

Below the search boxes is a horizontal menu with various filters: "Databases", "Date", "Language", "Document type", "Sort by", "Browse indexes", "Autostemming", "Discipline", and "Treatment". The "Databases" filter is currently expanded to show "GEOBASE" selected with a small orange square icon.

At the bottom right of the search area, there are links for "Turn on AutoSuggest", "+ Add search field", and "Reset form". A search button (magnifying glass) is located in the bottom right corner of the interface.



As you can see, using wildcard symbols returns many results on the desired topic.

The screenshot displays the Engineering Village search interface. At the top left is the Elsevier logo and the text 'Engineering Village'. The top right contains navigation links: 'Search', 'Search history' (with a notification badge '1'), 'Alerts' (with a badge '0'), 'Selected records' (with a badge '0'), and 'More'. Below this is a search bar with two input fields. The first field is labeled 'Quick search:' and contains 'fish*'. The second field is labeled 'AND' and contains 'sustainab*'. Below the search bar are 'Suggested terms' including 'Sustainability', 'Fishery Management', 'Sustainable Development', 'Stock Assessment', and 'Biodiversity'. A row of filters is visible: 'Databases', 'Date', 'Language', 'Document type', 'Sort by', 'Browse indexes', 'Autostemming', 'Discipline', and 'Treatment'. The search results section shows '17,694 records' in a light blue box, followed by the text 'found in GEOBASE for 1973-2023: (((fish*) WN ALL) AND ((sustainab*) WN ALL))'. Below the results are buttons for 'Create alert', 'Save search', 'Share search', and 'RSS feed'. An orange arrow points from the text above to the 'Date' filter dropdown.



The articles listed in the search results contain different variations of the terms **fishing** and **sustainable**.

1. **Between uncertainty and hope: Young leaders as agents of change in sustainable small-scale fisheries**
Espinoza-Tenorio, Alejandro (Department of Sustainability Science, El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Av. Rancho Polígono 2-A, Campeche, Lerma; 24500, Mexico); Ehuán-Noh, Romana Gabriela; Cuevas-Gómez, Gabriela Alejandra; Narchi, Nemer E.; Ramos-Muñoz, Dora Elia; Fernández-Rivera Melo, Francisco J.; Saldívar-Moreno, Antonio; Zepeda-Domínguez, José Alberto; Pérez-Jiménez, Juan Carlos; Oliveto-Andrade, Alma; Torre, Jorge Source: *Ambio*, v 51, n 5, p 1287-1301, May 2022
Database: GEOBASE
Document type: Journal article (JA)
Show preview ▾ Cited by in Scopus (1) [Link Resolver](#)
2. **Exploring fishing tourism sustainability in North-Eastern Mediterranean waters, through a stochastic modelling analysis: An opportunity for the few or a viable option for coastal communities ?**
Liontakis, Angelos (Department of Agribusiness and Supply Chain Management, School of Economics and Social Sciences, Agricultural University of Athens, Thebes, Greece); Vassilopoulou, Vassiliki Source: *Ocean and Coastal Management*, v 221, April 15, 2022
Database: GEOBASE
Document type: Journal article (JA)
Show preview ▾ [Link Resolver](#)
3. **Assessing organochlorine pesticide (OCP) residues in water and fish samples from a small perennial river and associated wetlands of Ganga Basin, India for sustainable management**
Sarkar, Uttam Kumar (ICAR-Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute, Kolkata, Barrackpore; 700120, India); Pathak, Ajey Kumar; Srivastava, Satyendra Mohan Source: *Sustainable Water Resources Management*, v 8, n 1, February 2022
Database: GEOBASE
Document type: Journal article (JA)
Show preview ▾ Cited by in Scopus (2) [Link Resolver](#)
4. **Status and challenges for sustainable billfish fisheries in the Western Indian Ocean**
Kadagi, N.I. (World Wildlife Fund, Washington; DC, United States); Wambiji, N.; Mann, B.; Parker, D.; Daly, R.; Thoya, P.; Rato, D.A.M.; Halafo, J.; Gaspare, L.; Sweke, E.A.; Ahmed, S.; Raseta, S.B.; Osore, M.; Maina, J.; Glaser, S.; Ahrens, R.; Sumaila, U.R. Source: *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, v 32, n 4, p 1035-1061, December 2022
Database: GEOBASE
Document type: Journal article (JA)
Show preview ▾ [Link Resolver](#)



Should you truncate everything?

It may be tempting, but you should not truncate every search term.

For example, if we were searching for articles about **ants**, we may try searching for **ant***. While this will locate articles with the keywords **ant** and **ants**, you could also get articles about:

antelope, **antithesis**, **antique**, **anthropology**, **anthrax**, **antimony**, **antebellum**, **anthem**

Truncating a short root word (e.g., containing fewer than 4 letters) may find unwanted, irrelevant results.



Wildcards (Truncation) Review

- Some databases and search engines (such as Google) automatically truncate words that have similar spellings.
- You will need to tell some databases to truncate by using a wildcard or truncation symbol.
- Some databases do not support wildcards or truncation at all.
- Check a database's **Help** feature to find out:
 - if it supports wildcards
 - if it truncates automatically
 - what wildcard or truncation symbol it uses
 - how the symbols work



Have Questions?

If you have any questions, please visit or contact the [Research Help](#) desk for assistance:

Email: research@smu.ca

Phone: 902-420-5544

Text: 902-702-3057

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Check out the library's complete list of [instructional guides](#) for more helpful resources.





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