Database Search Tips

Many databases allow you to use the following words to connect search terms. This strategy helps to make your search more efficient.

**AND**
- Narrows a search  
  e.g. invertebrates and aquatic

**OR**
- Broadens a search
- Allows you to use synonyms  
  e.g. urban or city

**NOT**
- Allows you to exclude certain types of information  
  e.g. pollution not air

**Parentheses = ( )**
- Allows you to specify the order of the search
- Terms within parentheses are searched first  
  e.g. (urban or city) AND (freshwater or aquatic) AND Nova Scotia

**Truncation = * ! ?** (each database has its own truncation symbol)
- Use of truncation directs the database to search for variations in spelling or word termination.  
  e.g. ecolog* (retrieves ecology, ecological, ecologically, etc)
  e.g. invertebrate* AND (freshwater or aquatic) AND Nova Scotia*

**TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS**
During a database search, if you retrieve too many results, try narrowing the search. On the other hand, if you retrieve too few or no results, try broadening the search.

In order to Narrow a Search (if too many hits):
- Use AND
- Use NOT
- Use terms that are more specific
- Use a narrower range of publication dates

In order to Broaden a Search (if too few hits):
- Use OR (with synonyms)
- Use terms that are more general
- Use truncation
- Use a broader range of publication dates

Other Suggestions:
- Be sure that you are using the correct terminology for the topic.
- Check that the search words are spelled correctly.
- Confirm that you are using an appropriate database.

For a refresher on search techniques, go to the Research Basics tutorial (10 min) at:  
http://infolit.library.dal.ca/tutorials/ResearchBasics/