

Centennial Science & Engineering Library

Refining Your Search Strategy in Life Sciences Searches

When you get too few references:

- **Try synonyms and acronyms for your words.**

For flower color: use color or colour or pigment to represent color Flower or inflorescence or corolla for flower. For polymerase chain reaction, use PCR.

Problems: If you're looking for animals that live in caves, you need to remember that cave is also an acronym that stand for care automatic virtual environment (CAVE) or words could occur in fields where you don't want them (there is an author named "Cave.")

- **Use a truncation symbol to get different word endings.**

Nitrogen fixation: nitrogen and fix* gets fixing, fixed, fixation. Problems: Be careful not to truncate too far to the left. For example, kin* will also retrieve kind, kinetophore, and kinky, in addition to the "kinship" that you want.

- **Choose a more comprehensive database.**

Biological Abstracts (BA) = Zoological Record >> Agricola = Medline > SciSearch = Cambridge Scientific Abstracts >> Biological and Agricultural Index. (In the fields covered.)

- **Drop a concept or make one more general.**

If searching *Brassica*, try the family Cruciferae or Brassicaceae. If looking for internode length in *Brassica*, just look for internode length, dropping the requirement that the studies be on *Brassica*.

When you get too many references:

- **Add an additional concept.**

For nitrogen fixation in plants, add specific organisms doing the fixing, e.g. *Frankia*.

- **Search only title keywords, not title, abstract, keywords.**
- **Limit to review articles in document type field.**
- **Use proximity operator to tighten the relationship.**

e.g., in SciSearch: nitrogen fixation<near/4>frankia