

Truncation. The Power Tool Known as: * (asterisk)

If you wanted to find a website about **advertising** using [Google](#) – and you wanted to make sure it was focused on advertising – you could use the **intitle:** command like so ...

intitle:advertising

Google would quickly find lots of websites with **advertising** in the **title**.

However, it would **not** necessarily find websites with the word advertise, or advertised, or advertises, or advertisement, or advertisements in the title.

If you wanted to look for websites that contained all the different forms of the word advertise – you would need to perform a different **intitle:** search for each form of the word. That would be a lot of searchers. ☹

Fortunately, for almost all databases and search engines we will study, except those named Google ☹, there is a solution to this problem.

That solution is called **truncation**.

According the Oxford English Dictionary to **truncate** means “**to shorten ... by cutting off a part.**”

So consider the following words – farm, farms, farmer, farmers, farming, and farmed.

They all look quite a bit alike (as they should because they’re all about farming!).

In fact if you lined them up vertically, and chopped off (or truncated) the different endings, you will notice that they all share the same root letters “f” “a” “r” an “m”

farm

farms

farmer

farming

farmed

The same is true for advertise, advertised, advertising, advertisement, and advertisements. When you truncate these words you end up with the root letters “a” “d” “v” “e” “r” “t” “i” and “s”

advertise

advertised

advertising

advertisement

advertisements

Librarians and information scientists have taken advantage of this by creating databases that allow you to search using just the truncated form of the word. **To use truncation simply place an asterisk at that spot in the word where all the different endings might appear.**

So if you were looking for an encyclopedia of biology, but thought you might also like an encyclopedia of the biological sciences you can indicate you want both by using an asterisk. By putting the asterisk at the end of the root letters for biology, biological, biologist, biologists, etc. you can allow [OneSearch](#) to look for all of these words at once (see OneSearch - Advanced Search - example below).

The screenshot shows the OneSearch interface with several red arrows highlighting specific features:

- A red arrow points to the "Books/Media" radio button in the "Search for:" section.
- A red arrow points to the "Subject" dropdown menu.
- A red arrow points to the "contains" operator between "Subject" and "encyclopedias".
- A red arrow points to the "AND" operator between the two search criteria.
- A red arrow points to the "Title" dropdown menu.
- A red arrow points to the "contains" operator between "Title" and "biolog*".
- A red arrow points to the "biolog*" search term, specifically to the asterisk.

The search criteria shown are:

- Search for: ☒ Everything ☒ Books/Media ☐ Course Reserves ☐ Local Libraries ☐ UNI ScholarWorks
- Subject contains encyclopedias
- AND Title contains biolog*

Material Type: All items
Language: Any language

Important. The asterisk must be placed immediately after the last letter (no spaces between the letters and the asterisk).

Another example.

What if you wanted to find encyclopedias that focused on politicians, political parties, and just good old fashioned politics?

politics

politician

politicians

political

If you like all those words you will want to use **politic***

The screenshot shows a library search interface with several components:

- Search for:** A row of radio buttons with options: ☐ Everything, ☒ Books/Media, ☐ Course Reserves, ☐ Local Libraries, and ☐ UNI ScholarWorks. A red arrow points to the **Books/Media** option.
- Subject:** A dropdown menu showing "Subject" with a downward arrow, followed by "contains" and "encyclopedias". A red arrow points to the "Subject" dropdown.
- AND:** A dropdown menu showing "AND" with a downward arrow, followed by "Title" and "contains". A red arrow points to the "AND" dropdown.
- Title:** A dropdown menu showing "Title" with a downward arrow, followed by "contains" and "politic*". A red arrow points to the "Title" dropdown.
- Material Type:** A dropdown menu showing "Material Type" with a downward arrow, followed by "All items".
- Language:** A dropdown menu showing "Language" with a downward arrow, followed by "Any language".

Red curved arrows indicate the sequence of selections: from **Books/Media** to **Subject**, then to **AND**, then to **Title**, and finally to **politic***.

Remember: Truncation will work in almost every database we study.

However: Truncation **does NOT** work in [Google](#), [Google Scholar](#), and [Google Books](#).