Welcome to the Health Sciences Library Online Tutorial Series. Part 1 of the introduction to database fundamentals provided you with a working definition of databases and explained some strategies for developing search terms.

In this video, we'll go a little deeper and explore some of the specific tools that databases employ to help make your search more systematic.

One unique feature of databases, is their ability to track your search history. Instead of forcing all your search terms into a single line, like you might in Google, the search history allows you to search one subject heading, or keyword at a time, track your results, save your searches to rerun at a later date, and easily remove and terms that are not working.

You also have the ability to combine these single terms, to methodically build up more complex searches.

Typically, your combination options are AND and OR.

Combine search terms using OR when you want to find articles that contain either search term, as well as those that contain both. This can help us construct a complex concept like 'flu shots' by searching for articles containing the subject heading "influenza vaccines" OR the keyword "swine flu".

Combine using AND when you want to bring together two distinct concepts and only find articles in which both terms appear. For example, we might be interested in articles dealing with flu shots AND pregnancy.

Effective use of the AND and OR operators will greatly improve your search skills. Just remember, combining using OR will broaden your search results, combining using AND will narrow them.

As you start combining search terms, it is helpful to monitor the changes to your result list. Most databases will display the results from your most recent search line directly beneath the search history. Take a look.

Chances are, you'll find some great results mixed in with others that are not so relevant.

At this point, it might be helpful to apply limits to your search. Limits are, essentially, specialized subject headings that will limit your result list based on a number of factors, including: Language, Date, Publication Type, Age Group, etc.

For example, if our "flu shots" and "pregnancy" search is bringing back a number of results from the 1990s, we may want to use the date limit to confine our search to last five years. Ensuring the evidence we are finding is up to date.

Limits are usually accessible beneath the search history, or in a toolbar along the side of the page.
Recognizing why irrelevant results are appearing, and using search limits to weed them out, is key to efficient database searching.

At this point, you've probably found a couple of articles that you'd like to take a closer look at, but remember, databases are collecting information about these articles, and not the articles themselves.

However, if you are accessing the database through the HSL website, having logged in through LibAccess if you are off-campus, each database record will contain the Get it @ Mac Button. Clicking this button allows you to check the electronic and physical availability of this article within the McMaster Library system.

Follow the links to find the full-text document.

This concludes our tutorial on database fundamentals. You now understand the process of building a search history, combining search terms, limiting results, and accessing full text documents.

With a basic understanding of how these resources work, you can now confidently move onto tutorials dealing with specific databases.

Thanks for watching, and happy searching!