Database Search Legends

The following briefly outlines a variety of common symbols used within standard searches.
Please refer to the appropriate database.
Note that each search is different and not all fields or symbols may have been used.

For further clarification, please feel free to contact your MUHC hospital librarian.

1. Medline (Ovid)

	Field	Searches in…
Search fields	/ or .sh.	subject heading (MeSH)
	.tw. or ti,ab.	title or abstract
	.kf.	Keywords provided by author
	.jw.	Word in journal title
	.pt.	publication type
	.mp.	different fields including title, abstract or subject headings

	Operator Symbol	Means…
Operators	***** before subject heading	The subject heading is considered a major point of the article (focus)
	"exp" before subject heading	Results retrieved include the selected subject heading & all its more specific terms (explode)
	ADJ*n*	Retrieves records that contain search terms within a specified number (n) of words from each other, in any order
	* after a term	Unlimited truncation: retrieves all possible suffix variations
	?	Optional wildcard: used to substitute zero or one characters within or at the end of a word. Useful to retrieve results with spelling variations (eg. American vs. British spelling)

	Subheading	Defined as…
Subheadings	ae	Adverse effects
	di	Diagnosis
	ge	Genetics
	po	Poisoning
	to	Toxicity

Subheadings are qualifiers added to a subject heading to refine the meaning.
A complete list of subheadings is available at:
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/help/#mesh-subheadings

2. Embase (Ovid)

	Field	Searches in...
Search fields	/ or .sh.	subject heading (EMTREE thesaurus)
	.tw. or ti,ab.	title or abstract
	.kf.	Keywords provided by author
	.dq.	Candidate term (under consideration for EMTREE)
	.jx.	Word in journal title
	.pt.	publication type
	.mp.	different fields including title, abstract or subject headings

	Operator	Means...
Operators	* before subject heading	The subject heading is considered a major point of the article (focus)
	"**exp**" before subject heading	Results retrieved include the selected subject heading & all its more specific terms (explode)
	ADJn	Retrieves records that contain search terms within a specified number (n) of words from each other, in any order
	* after a term	Unlimited truncation: retrieves all possible suffix variations
	?	Optional wildcard: used to substitute zero or one characters within or at the end of a word. Useful to retrieve results with spelling variations (eg. American vs. British spelling)

	Subheading	Defined as...
Subheadings	ae	Adverse drug reaction
	di	Diagnosis
	si	Side effects
	th	Therapy
	to	Drug toxicity

Subheadings are qualifiers added to a subject heading to refine the meaning.
A complete list of subheadings is available at: http://ospguides.ovid.com/OSPguides/embase.htm#fs.

3. CINAHL (Ebsco)

	Field	Searches in...
Search fields	MH	Topic (Subject heading)
	MM	Major Topic (Focused subject heading)
	TI	title
	AB	abstract

	Operator	Means...
Operators	+ after a subject heading	Results retrieved include the selected Subject Heading & all its more specific terms (explode)
	N*n*	Retrieves records that contain search terms within a specified number (n) of words from each other, in any order
	* after a term	Unlimited truncation: retrieves all possible suffix variations

	Subheading	Defined as...
Subheadings	AE	Adverse effects
	CO	Complications
	NU	Nursing
	PC	Prevention and Control