Truncation and Wildcard Symbols

* The asterisk is a wildcard that matches zero or more characters. For example, a search on "Sam*" will bring back results that include "Sam", "Samantha", "Samuel", etc. You can also search alternate spellings with the asterisk (*), which represents 0 to 5 unknown characters. The query "Johann*" will search for Johann and Johannes. A query for "Smel*"er will search for Smeltzer and Smelzer, among others. Note: You cannot use an asterisk as the first, second, or third character of a search term.

? The question mark acts as a single-character wildcard. For example, a search on "El?abeth" will bring back results that include "Elisabet" or "Elizabeth". Note: You cannot use a question mark as the first character of a search term.

NOTE: Using these symbols in combination is also an acceptable practice. For example, a search for "El?*a" will return hits for Elza, Elisa, Elizabeth, Elisabeth, as well as Elia, Elmar, etc.

Keyword Searching

The Keyword field can be used to search for any word you would expect to be found in the database you are searching. This can include things such as an occupation or a location. You are able to only search for keywords. Keep in mind that if you enter more than one term you will need to use quotation marks to ensure an exact phrase search, such as "The Great War." If you choose to combine a name with a keyword and the database finds a match for the name, but not the keyword, it will not provide the results for you.

The Keyword field can be found on the following search pages:

- U.S. Federal Census
- Books Collection
- Revolutionary War era records
- Freedman's Bank records
Exact matching options are seen on the Census, Books, Revolutionary War, and Freedman's Bank collection search pages. As you type information into a search field you will see a checkbox and the word Exact display below the field. Tick the box or click Exact to see more matching options.

Each search field has different matching criteria:

- **First & Middle Name**
  - Exact - retrieves results the exactly match the data entered in the search field
  - Sounds like - retrieves results that match exactly and those that are similar phonetic matches
  - Similar - retrieves results that match exactly and those that have a similar spelling or meaning
  - Initials - retrieves results that match exactly and those that include initials that match the first letter of the first name (and the middle name, if entered).

- **Last Name**
  - Exact - retrieves results the exactly match the data entered in the search field
  - Sounds like - retrieves results that match exactly and those that are similar phonetic matches
  - Similar - retrieves results that match exactly and those that have a similar spelling or meaning
  - Soundex - Soundex is a common algorithm used to generate alternate spellings of a surname. If you choose this option, any record that contains one of the Soundex variations for a surname might appear in your results.

The above name fields are also seen in the Add Family Member sections of many search pages.

- **Year**
  - Exact to
  - This year
  - +/- 1 year
  - +/- 2 years
  - +/- 5 years
  - +/- 10 years

- **Location**
  - Exact to
  - This place
  - County
  - County and adjacent counties
  - State
  - State and adjacent states
  - Country

- The following fields have an Exact match checkbox and no other options. Check the box to use this limit.
  - Keyword
  - Publication Title
  - Race / Nationality

**Note:** Click the “About these settings” link in any Exact match menu to read more about the available options for that field.