Literature (Database) Searching Tips

Planning your search

- Identify best database to search (CKN Research Databases A-Z list page has description of topics covered for each product)
- Keep your search broad at the start
- List related words and synonyms
- Break down the search into individual topics
- Most databases will default to or have an Advanced search which allows more complex searching using AND or OR etc
- Search individual topics, one at a time; then combine them
  By doing this, you can track your results and delete / add topics if you need to without re-doing entire search
- Be clear about the question you are trying to answer
- Use PICO(T) format to clarify your question, eg:
  - P = population or patient group (eg children with asthma, refugees suffering PTSD, etc)
  - I = intervention or indicator (treatment, therapy, etc)
  - C = comparing interventions or treatments?
  - O = desired outcome for the patient
  - T = Type of evidence (clinical trials, systematic review, case report, etc)

Subject headings (MH / MeSH) searches

- Subject headings are assigned to articles when they are added to a database to describe topics covered in an article
- Subject headings are fixed list of terms where they have a relationship to one another in the structured list
- Subject headings are a good way of picking up related topics
- Suggest subject terms can be selected in EBSCO Medline, Psycinfo and CINAHL databases. Or look for MeSH or THESAURUS tabs to search subjects.
- In the databases, Suggest subject or Map term will take your keyword and check it against Subject Headings lists
- EXPLODE applies to subject headings – it is a way of picking up related and more specific words in your search
- Use EXPLODE to keep your search as broad as possible at the beginning
- Major Concept or Focus will limit your search where subject is the main focus of the article – use only if obtaining too many non-relevant results
Subject headings will vary across different databases depending on the discipline or topics covered

Subject headings use American spelling – if you chose subject headings instead of keywords it should pick up articles with American & British spellings

Subject heading searches usually give more precise or relevant results

Subject headings are usually indicated in CINAHL & Medline etc as blue underlined (hyperlinked) links

**Keyword searching**

- If you don’t select Subject Headings, then the system will search for words exactly as you type them
- If using keywords, the system will pick them up if they are mentioned anywhere in the article reference
- If you use Suggest subject headings, your keyword will appear at the bottom of the table in black text
- Key word searching is useful for refining searches
- Key word searching can be restricted to Title or Abstract (specific fields) etc for more relevant results
- Key word searches can give more results, but with lower relevance (eg lead – the metal or to guide people?) or few / none results
- Tip for searching key words
  - Use * to pick up different beginnings / endings / alternative spellings
    - Eg p*ediatrics will pick up American & British Spelling
    - Eg child* will pick up child, child’s, children, childhood, etc
  - Consider spelling out acronyms or abbreviations in full if you don’t get any results
  - Use double quote marks to search for phrases or adjacent keywords, eg “ischemic stroke”; “shortness of breath”

**Using AND / OR / NOT**

**AND** (narrows search – less results) Used to combine two topics, ie topics must be mentioned in the same article: Eg AND gives results in the section where terms overlap in this diagram eg articles that mention both topics, accidental falls and hip protectors

**OR** (broadens out search – more results) Used to collect related topics or synonyms. Eg Depression OR Bipolar disorder (include both topics / all topics in the search)
**NOT** (excludes a topic from search) Used when you want to know about one topic but not another related topic.

Eg Sexually Transmitted Diseases but not HIV will only include non-HIV STDs

- These words are called Boolean Operators
- Another Boolean operator that may come in handy if you want to search keywords as a phrase is **ADJ** – adjacent (ie find this word next to this word), eg numbers **ADJ** needed **ADJ** treat (for phrase ‘numbers needed to treat’)

### Using database LIMITS

- Most databases have an ability to limit search results

  *in EBSCO (CINAHL, Medline, Psycinfo etc go to Refine Search results, Show More link) available via CKN*

- Refine or Limit your results after you’ve carried out your search
- Some frequently used limits include:
  - Year of publication (eg date range, last five years, etc)
  - English language
  - Age, Sex (Male or Female), Human
  - Publication type (eg case report, clinical trial, randomised controlled trial, review, systematic reviews, etc)

### Finding Articles

- Using CKN research databases, when you have relevant results you’ll either:
  - Find a PDF icon – click on it to view full text of article
OR

- Look for the **CKN Full Text** button

The **CKN Full Text** link links out to CKN E-Journals and other resources; if available click on the **Full text available** link

- You may find this link in PubMed or any free internet database; look for same link to CKN

- If the article is not on CKN, use the **Request this article** link

- If searching PubMed etc, go to CKN E-Journals to find copies of full text articles

- You must be logged into CKN and registered for off-site access if you want to access databases and E-Journals from home or off site

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**Other useful things to know**

- Most databases don’t have spell check; if you don’t get any results, check your spelling

- Create an account on the database to save your search history so you can run it again

- Some databases may time out after approx 10 minutes of no activity – use database links to remain active in our search. Do not use the internet browser back button

- Remember to save or email your results or search

- Most databases will have search tips or help – check the screen when you are searching

- Contact the library for help with your search (tel. 4226 6415 or 4226 6677 or email us at cairns_library@health.qld.gov.au)

- The Library will do literature searches for you if they are work related

- If you are having trouble tracking down articles, send your request to the Library (if emailing, include your payroll / employee ID for copyright purposes)

- LKC has produced following guides to help with searching databases:
  
  - [http://cairns.health.qld.libguides.com/onlineressouses](http://cairns.health.qld.libguides.com/onlineressouses)