Searching for Evidence in the Literature

Houston Cole Library provides access to the online databases listed below that are useful for finding evidence-based literature. PubMed and CINAHL are premier databases for nursing. The Cochrane Library and Joanna Briggs Institute provide access to systematic reviews, the highest level of evidence.

- CINAHL Plus with Full Text
- Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews
- Joanna Briggs Institute EBP Database
- PubMed/Medline

Database Search Tips and Techniques

- Limit your search to Academic or Scholarly Journals. Many databases offer an option to limit your search by selecting an option such as “peer-reviewed” or “scholarly”
- Boolean Search: Use connectors AND, OR, NOT. AND narrows your search, and OR broadens a search, NOT excludes unwanted terms. (Use Advanced Search in most databases for Boolean search.) For example:
  - Cats AND Dogs;
  - Cats OR Dogs;
  - Cats NOT Dogs.
- Parentheses: Use to group words together as a phrase in Boolean searches. i.e. (stem cell) AND mouse
- Truncation: Common symbol is * (asterisk.) Use to search for variations in word endings, i.e. nurs* will find nurse, nurses, nursing.
- Set limiters for publication dates, population, source type, etc.
- You may need to revise your search terms if:
  - Your search results are not relevant
  - You get too many results
  - Apply limits such as age ranges or publication dates to help narrow searches
- If you get too few results, there may not be enough published evidence on your clinical question

Tips for PICO Searching

- Start out with a broad search, using your P and I terms. (For example, Population=Older adults, Intervention=Tai Chi)
  - Combine them using AND. Include the O if you get a large number of results. The reason is that outcomes tend to be very specific and if you don’t use the exact wording that the researcher did, you could miss something.
  - Use AND to combine the P results set with the I results set. In the following example from CINAHL Plus with Full Text, search on older adults AND Tai Chi. Look for the C and O in the results from that search, or add the O (fall* prevention) if you get a lot of hits.
• Find some relevant studies among your results, and examine the reference sections to find subject headings and keywords in the paper’s text and abstract that you can use as search terms.
• Look for terms such as **Related Articles** or **Find Similar** to find other documents
• Look for keywords used in a document’s beginning or its abstract

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**Easy guide to searching for evidence for the busy clinician**

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Abstract: The busy clinician is constantly faced with clinical questions regarding patient care. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the large amount of health information available electronically. This article offers one easy approach for searching the electronic database. It is intended for the busy clinician who is unsure how to conduct an electronic search. It provides guidance on where to search and how to search using the PICO search method. It also provides a list of useful resources to help clinicians critically appraise the articles found to determine its relevance.

**Key words:** education; evidence-based practice; information management

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**Controlled Vocabulary, Thesaurus,** (or the way terms are indexed in the database)

For more information on CINAHL Plus with Full Text limits and subject headings, see: [http://guides.lib.uw.edu/c.php?g=345599&p=2596668](http://guides.lib.uw.edu/c.php?g=345599&p=2596668)

For more on searching PubMed using MeSH (Medical Subject Headings), see PubMed 10 Tips, from UNC Health Sciences Library. Tip 7 is Using PubMed [http://guides.lib.unc.edu/pubmedtentips](http://guides.lib.unc.edu/pubmedtentips)

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