
A step-by-step guide to searching for literature - summary

Step 1 Why are you searching?

Be clear about the purpose for which you are searching. Do you just want a few references or to be comprehensive? To be more comprehensive, use broader terms and fewer concepts.

Step 2 Break down your search question into concepts

For example, if you were doing a search about whether vitamin C prevents the common cold, these are the concepts that you could identify in your search:

- 1) Vitamin C
- 2) Prevention of infection
- 3) Common cold

You could use one of the tools available to assist in this process. The most well known is PICO – which stands for: Population (or patient or problem), Intervention, Comparison (or control), Outcome.

Step 3 Rank the concepts in order of importance

Once you have identified all of the concepts in your search, it is then helpful to rank them. This will help you, if you find too few references, to know which concept you can leave out while still finding relevant results.

Step 4 Think of different terms/spellings for each concept

This might be words or terms that have the same or a similar meaning or a different spelling of the same word.

Examples:

If you are searching for 'Vitamin C', search also for 'Ascorbic acid'.

If you are searching for 'Myocardial infarction', search also for 'heart attack'.

Step 5 Choose the right resource(s)

Different resources will allow you to find different types of information. You can find some of the most reliable information resources on our website: www.uhl-library.nhs.uk/resources

You can also always ask the library for advice.

Healthcare databases

Access to the main healthcare databases (including Medline, Embase, PsycINFO, CINAHL amongst others) are provided to the NHS by a range of suppliers. They contain references to literature from all over the world – some of which is not in English. You can find more information on what is available, including links to them all here: www.uhl-library.nhs.uk/databases

Log in to the databases using your NHS Athens account. (If you do not have an NHS Athens account, you can self-register for one here: www.uhl-library.nhs.uk/athens)

Step 6 Start searching

These are the different search methods and techniques that you can use. You can find more details in our full search guide or ask library staff for more information.

- Basic keyword search Simply searching for words
- Phrase keyword searching Using “” to define phrases
- Truncation keyword searching Using *or \$ to search for word stems (with additional letters after the truncation symbol)
- Subject heading searching Using the database’s standardised tags
- Combining search lines Use AND/OR to combine lines together
- Limits Limit references by type, date, language etc.

Step 7 Evaluate information found

Not everything you read is true. Is what you find up-to-date, relevant, authoritative, accurate and balanced?

Fulltext How to get the fulltext of articles found

References in the healthcare databases should come with information on how to get the fulltext either online, in print or on request. You can ask library staff to obtain the fulltext for you.

Contact the libraries

If you have any questions on anything contained in this guide, or anything else on searching for information or using our resources, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with one of the libraries.

LRI Library	Odames Library, Level 1, Victoria Building Email: lri.library@uhl-tr.nhs.uk Phone: 0116 258 5558
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Glenfield Library	Ground floor, Education Centre Email: ggh.library@uhl-tr.nhs.uk Phone: 0116 256 3672
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LGH Library	First floor, Education Centre Email: leicslib@uhl-tr.nhs.uk Phone: 0116 258 8124
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