Tips for Systematic Searches

Librarian: Cari Merkley

**Tip #1 – Databases - Search one idea at a time**
Search each concept separately in the database. For example, do a search for the concept of sexual assault. Next, search for the concept of injuries. Then combine the two searches (see Tip #4).

Search using both subject headings (see Tip #2) and keywords (see Tip #3).

**Tip #2 – Databases - Using the database headings in your search**
When articles are added to CINAHL, Medline and other databases, they are labelled according to the subject(s) they cover. The labels or headings used are taken from a set list. This list varies from database to database.

In Medline, they are called MeSH (Medical Subject Headings)

In CINAHL, they are called CINAHL Headings

To search for all of the articles using subject labels or headings
The following steps apply to databases offered by EBSCO (CINAHL, Medline, and PsycINFO)

a) Click on MeSH (if you are in Medline) or CINAHL headings (if you are in CINAHL). The link in both cases is along the top of the screen.

b) Type in a keyword and click on browse

sex offenses

Browse

c) Check off the subject term(s) that interest you. Some subjects are subdivided into more specific headings — if that is the case, you will have the option to **explode** the term to include all of the topics under the main heading. You can see what is under the heading by clicking on the highlighted text.

Sex Offenses is the main heading — Rape and Child Abuse, Sexual are subheadings
Only select **Explode** if all of the subheadings are of interest to you. For example, the heading of *Wounds and Injuries* has 51 subheadings, including *Contusions and Abrasions,* and *Fractures.* You can check off the specific subheadings you would like to search from that list, or click on **Explode** next to *Wounds and Injuries* to include them all.

*d) Once you select a subject heading, look on the far right hand side of your screen.*

![Search Database](image)

Confirm if you would like to **Explode** the topic (i.e. include all the subheadings under that topic in your search). Do not check off **main concept** – it will limit your search too much. Once you have made your selection, click on **search database.**

The database will search for all the articles that have this heading or label. Repeat steps a-d to search for another subject heading.

**Tip #3 – Databases - Make your keyword searches meaningful**

Make your keyword searches more effective by incorporating some of the following database tricks. These tricks work in EBSCO databases like CINAHL, PsycINFO, and Medline, but double check the requirements of other database before using them.

- * The asterick at the end of a word allows for multiple endings e.g. *sex* will find sex, sexual, sexually, etc.
- "" Use quotation marks around two or more words if you would like to search for a particular phrase “health promotion”
- **N** N stands for near. Use it between two words that you want to appear close to each other in a sentence. **N+** a number indicates how many words can come between your search terms. Place the search terms in brackets.
  - e.g. (*sex* n2 assault*) will find articles where the words *sex* (or sexual etc) and assault within two words of each other

**Tip #4 – Databases - Combining your search**

Once you have run searches on all of your concepts, it is time to combine them.

The database keeps track of your search in your search history. Click on “Search History” to view the searches you have done. You will find the link under the search box.
Tips for Systematic Searches 2013

Searching: **Medline**

Choose Databases

(MH “Sex Offenses+”) | Search | Clear
---|---|---

**Basic Search**  **Advanced Search**  **Visual Search**  **Search History**

Your searches will be listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search History/Alerts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Print Search History</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select/deselect all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search ID#</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>S3 and S6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>S4 or S5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>Injur*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>(MH “Wounds and Injuries+”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>S1 or S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>rape or (sex* N2 assault*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>(MH “Sex Offenses+”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To combine your search, type the Search ID # (e.g. S1) in the search box. Use OR between searches where any of the terms will do. In the example above (**S1 or S2**) is searching for any articles that have the heading Sex Offences (S1) or the keywords rape or sexual assault (S2).

The results of this search can then be combined with other searches using AND. Use AND to combine searches when both concepts must be present for the article to be relevant.

**S3 and S6**

**Questions? Need help searching?**
You are welcome to contact Cari with questions or to make an individual appointment. She can be reached by email at cmerkley@mtroyal.ca or by phone at 440-5068 from Monday to Friday.