Lit Searching Cheat Sheet

6 MAJOR STEPS IN A SEARCH
1. Create a well-defined question
2. Brainstorm and gather synonyms
3. Construct the search strategy
4. Select database(s)
5. Tailor search strategy to database(s)
6. Save search & export results to reference manager

Create a well-defined question

- **Clinical Questions - Classic Formulations**
  - P: population
  - I: intervention
  - C: comparison
  - O: outcome
  - T: time/type of study

Breaks up the question into distinct, searchable concepts:
Example: Does art therapy alleviate PTSD symptoms?

Gather synonyms

**Think broadly and abstractly!**
- Terms with the same meaning
  - Hypertension/High blood pressure
- Terms with alternate spellings
  - Leukemia/Leukaemia
- Complex concepts described inconsistently
  - Long-term, patient-reported satisfaction…/Patients’ experiences with...
- Umbrella terms and specific names
  - Sexually transmitted disease/genital warts, syphilis
- Keywords and database-specific subject terms
  - Cancer, tumor/Neoplasm (MeSH)

Construct search strategies

Identify distinct concepts and brainstorm synonyms for each. Construct search by combining concepts with Boolean operators. Use keywords and subject terms in combination.

**Boolean Logic Operators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operators</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AND</td>
<td>Stoma AND Bowel cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Stoma OR Colostomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT</td>
<td>Coffee NOT Starbucks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example Question:** Does handwashing among healthcare workers reduce hospital-acquired infection?

Minimum searchable concepts:
- Handwashing
- healthcare workers
- hospital-acquired infection

Map search into chart. Brainstorm synonyms and consider database subject headings.

Select Databases

By subject: [www.library.uthscsa.edu/subjects/subjects/databases.php](http://www.library.uthscsa.edu/subjects/subjects/databases.php)

- **PubMed**: Medline + ebooks & life-sciences citations
- **CINAHL**: Nursing & Allied Health focus
- **Scopus**: Interdisciplinary, access to Embase citations
- **PsycINFO**: Psychology and mental health
- **Cochrane Library**: Systematic reviews
- **Trip**: (Turning Research Into Practice): Clinical Search engine

Tailor Search Strategy to the Database

- Understand different vendor interfaces (EBSCO publishes CINAHL and PsycINFO; Elsevier publishes Scopus)
- Differentiate between keywords and subject headings (Medline -> MeSH; Scopus ->keywords)
- Different databases, different subject headings
- Know if the content is peer-reviewed (Medline = all peer-reviewed; CINAHL & PubMed include non-peer-reviewed material)

Tips:
- Search one concept at a time (refer to the chart above)
- Map terms to subject headings and read the scope notes or definitions
- Look at the subject heading in the tree
- When starting out, explode, but don’t focus
- Use both keywords and subject headings for more results
- Combine terms with Boolean operators
- Gather keywords and subject headings from relevant results
- Save results and search history

**Database shortcuts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[tiab]</td>
<td>PubMed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>CINAHL, Ovid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.kw</td>
<td>Ovid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: [Lenton, E. (n.d.) Advanced Lit Searching: A Cheat Sheet](http://example.com)
CLINICAL RESOURCES:

- **UpToDate**: Evidence-based, physician authored
- **PubMed Clinical Queries**: retrieves targeted results (clinical study categories, systematic reviews, medical genetics) to clinical questions
- **STAT!Ref**: electronic accessible healthcare reference material; 5-Minute Clinical Consult, EBMcalc & Evidence Alerts
- **AccessMedicine** (McGraw-Hill): access info to facilitate decision-making at the point-of-care; textbooks, procedural videos, diff dx tool, DX tests
- **Clinical Key** (Elsevier): clinical search engine to support clinical decisions; books, journals, drug monographs, guidelines, patient ed, First Consult/Clinical Overviews, multimedia, Procedures Consult

Export and manage citations:

Refworks is supported by the HSC. Use it!
- Create an account on the library homepage
- Get help on the RefWorks YouTube channel

Get help from your Library Liaison:

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