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Database Searching Tips

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Basic Rules of Doing a Good Search

1) **Break Search into Concepts**
   - Easier to Manipulate Your Search to Get Desired Results
   - Start with Two Most Important Concepts from Your Question
   - Combine with Boolean Operators - **AND, OR, NOT**

2) **Come up with Alternative Terms or Concepts for Your Topic**
   - Databases = Different Audiences
   - Remember Terms People Use Are Based on Background/Perspective
   - Sources for:
     - Index/Entry Terms of Subject Headings
     - Terms from Related Articles
     - Google Scholar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept/ Term</th>
<th>Synonyms/ Related Concepts (Other Ways to Describe)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept/ Term #1</td>
<td>(Other Ways to Describe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept/ Term #2</td>
<td>(Other Ways to Describe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept/ Term #3</td>
<td>(Other Ways to Describe)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Truncation - Train* (Trained, Trainer, Training, etc.)**
Be careful where you place * as it could return unrelated articles.

**Grouping - Use Quotation Marks**
Use to search as a phrase - “Pressure Ulcer” instead of “Pressure AND Ulcer”

**Compound Words** – May need to search word together and separate. (ex. “Health Care”/ “Healthcare”)

**Title and Abstract – Two Best Fields to Search**
PubMed - [TIAB] or Advanced Search/Drop Downs
CINAHL - Use drop down beside Search box / Not Always Necessary

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Nursing Research Guide: https://guides.library.vcu.edu/nursing
3) **Use Subject Heading When Possible**
   - PubMed – Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)
   - CINAHL – CINAHL Headings
   - Useful Tools:
     - *MeSH on Demand:* [https://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/MeSHonDemand.html](https://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/MeSHonDemand.html)
     - *Yale MeSH Analyzer:* [http://mesh.med.yale.edu/](http://mesh.med.yale.edu/)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Controlled Vocabulary (Subject Heading)</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May provide terms that can broaden or narrow search</td>
<td>• Recently coined terms may not have a subject term assigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Accounts for most common synonyms</td>
<td>• Can be difficult to find if no list of subject terms is included in the database</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Retrieve all items in database indexed under the topic</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Keyword</strong></td>
<td>• Retrieve synonyms, jargon, new or distinctive words</td>
<td>• May retrieve irrelevant articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify relevant articles quickly to find appropriate controlled vocabulary</td>
<td>• Your search must account for synonyms and alternative terms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) **Start Your Search Broad and Then Focus**
   - Use Limits/Filter of the Database (*Publication/Study Types, Language, Gender/Sex, Etc.*)
     - Start at the Top of the Evidence Pyramid and Work Down
     - Add an Additional Concept or Term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding Too Many Articles?</th>
<th>Ways to Decrease/Focus Your Results</th>
<th>Not Finding Enough?</th>
<th>Ways to Expand/Increase Your Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do not explode</td>
<td>• Explode whenever possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Restrict subject heading to major focus</td>
<td>• Do not restrict subject headings to major focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Choose any relevant subheadings</td>
<td>• Do not choose subheadings</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Utilize limits to English language, human subjects, review articles, etc.</td>
<td>• Consider searching back in time, look at citations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Consider doing a keyword search</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5) **Always Search at Least Two Databases – Unique Articles in Each Database**

- Provide different ways to access same information base and may find evidence in one database using terminology that would not be found in another database.

### Notes