Subject Heading (MeSH) searching in Ebscohost

How does a Subject Heading search work?

All documents within the databases in EBSCOhost are categorised according to the main subjects they cover. These categorisations are their Subject Heading terms. When performing a Subject Heading search you are thus looking for documents categorised according to the term you enter.

A Subject Heading search will find results where the main focus or one of the main focuses of the document relates to your search term. A Keyword search, on the other hand, will find results where your search terms appear somewhere within a document, whether the focus of the document is on those terms or not.

A full literature search though should consist of a combination of Subject Heading and Keyword terms for each concept of your search topic. This is because a Keyword search acts as a backup to the Subject Heading search, in case there is no Subject Heading for that topic or if a heading has been mistakenly left out of the description of an article etc.

Selecting databases

If you are performing a Subject Heading search you can only search one database at a time. This is because different databases may use different subject terms for the same topic.

Selecting the Subject Heading search option

To search using Subject Heading terms in databases from the EBSCOhost platform you will need to select the Subject Heading option from the top of the screen. This will differ depending upon which database you use.

Here are some examples:
Performing a Subject Heading search

You will need to enter the search term, from the first concept of your topic, in the search box and select the relevancy ranked option and click on Browse.

# only one term can be entered at a time and techniques such as truncation cannot be used.

The Subject Heading terms closest to the term you have entered will appear. Often there will be more than one Subject Heading term to choose from. You can select as many of the terms which you feel are relevant to your topic.
If you wish to see broader or narrower terms click on the Subject Heading itself. This will take you to the **Subject Tree/Thesaurus**. Here you will see a list of broader and narrower terms relating to the Subject Heading term you have chosen. You can choose to search using any of these terms if you wish- or go back to the previous screen.

Once you have selected your terms you will need to decide if you want to **Explode** your search which will also search for more specific terms or use your term as the **Major Concept** which will only search using your specific term. You can also decide to search using specific **sub-headings** relating to your term, if you wish.
Once you are happy with your terms select **Search Database**

Your results for this search will be displayed in your **search history**.

**Combining a Subject Heading search with a Keyword search**

To complete a full search you should then perform a Keyword search for the same concept of your topic which will also be added to your search history.

These two searches should then be combined, in the search bar at the top of the screen, using the **OR** operator.
Your final search for that concept of your topic will then consist of results which focus on the subject term you have entered, in this case ‘exercise’ and results where your keywords appear, in this case ‘exercise’ and related terms.

This process should be repeated for the other concepts of your topic. The final searches for each concept should then be combined using the **AND** operator to retrieve your final result.