Subject Heading (MeSH) searching in Ovid Online

How does a Subject Heading search work?

All documents within databases in Ovid Online 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.

Performing a Subject Heading search

To search by Subject Heading in Ovid Online you need to select the Advanced Search option. This is the screen you are automatically taken to once you have selected your database. The Map term to Subject Heading box should also be ticked.

You can then enter the search term, from the first concept of your topic, in the search box.

# 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.
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 **Focus** your search which will only search using your specific term.

You will also be given the option to include all sub-headings related to your Subject Heading. It is recommended to do this.

Click on **Continue** to perform your search.
Your results will be added to 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 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.
You can refine your results further by using Ovid’s ‘Search Limiter’ options (see the Using Search Limiters guide in this section to discover how to do this).