Database search checklist

Use this checklist after you have performed your first database search for your research project/dissertation. Looking at each of the questions and checking them against your own search will help to ensure that you have performed the search correctly.

The checklist has been divided into sections covering the different aspects of your search:

- Your overall translation of your research question
- Your use of Subject Headings/MESH terms
- Your use of keyword/free text terms
- Your use of the Search History function
- Your use of limits/filters

Translation of the research question

This section applies to your search as a whole

Are all the concepts from your research question/PICO (or other framework) included in your search?

All the concepts from your question should be covered by your search.
Subject Heading/MESH search

This section applies to the Subject Heading/MESH searches you have performed.

[NB] Subject Heading/MeSH searching may not be possible in all databases

**Have you performed a Subject Heading search for each concept of your topic?**

Subject Heading terms may not be available for all the concepts of your question. As long as you have checked, that is fine.

**Was your Subject Heading search exhaustive enough?**

You may need to do more than one Subject Heading search for each concept of your question. If you have search terms which do not appear in the subject index of your initial search, you will need to perform extra Subject Heading searches e.g.

- if you were looking for Subject Headings relating to *children* and the term *paediatric* wasn’t listed as an option in the index, you would need to perform a separate Subject Heading search for *paediatric*, to see if it appears in a different part of the index.

- if you were looking for Subject Heading terms relating to *Africa* you would need to check if separate Subject Heading terms are available for each of the different countries within Africa (if they are not all available together in the index).

**Are all the Subject Headings you have selected relevant?**

Use only Subject Headings which are relevant to your question and inclusion criteria e.g.

- if your question relates to *occupational stress* you shouldn’t select broader Subject Headings such as *Mental Health* as this would retrieve studies relating to all aspects of mental health.
Keyword (free text) search

This section refers to the keyword (free text) searches you have performed using your own search terms

Are you using enough search terms for each concept of your topic?

You should use as many relevant search terms for each concept of your question, as possible. For some concepts there may be only one or two relevant search terms, for other concepts there may be lots of relevant terms e.g.

- if your question was related to Africa, as well as the term Africa, you would also need to list all of the countries within Africa as search terms.

Are your search terms relevant or too broad?

Your search terms should be relevant to your question and inclusion criteria and not too broad e.g.

- terms like therapy and intervention on their own are too broad and are best used in connection with other terms e.g. alternative therapy, behaviour therapy, birth interventions.

You may need to use Proximity Operators to link terms together to make them more relevant e.g.

- interventions to improve patient attendance (see the question below on Proximity Operators)

Are you combining your related search terms correctly?

OR should be used to combine your related terms together, whether you use one line to combine them or if you are using separate lines e.g.
Have you selected a Field option for your search terms?

You should restrict your search to only retrieve studies where your search terms appear in the abstract or anywhere within the text (Text Word in Ovid Online/All Text in EBSCOhost) e.g.

![Search interface]

Has truncation been used for all relevant terms?

The truncation symbol * can be used to retrieve search terms that have variant endings, thus making your search broader e.g.

- **child** will retrieve studies containing not only the term child but also childhood and children

Ensure that using truncation won’t retrieve irrelevant terms e.g.

- famil* will retrieve studies with the term family and families but also familiar and familiarity. In this case, don’t use truncation.

Has the truncation symbol been placed correctly?

The truncation symbol should be placed at the end of the word stem i.e. from where the letters change for the different variants of the term e.g.

- For the term promote the truncation symbol comes after the letter t (promot*) to retrieve studies with the term promote, promoting, promotion, promotional.
Do your search terms cover all spelling variants?

Some search terms have English and American spellings e.g.

- *paediatric/pediatric, behaviour/behaviour, organisation/organization*

Check your search terms to see if any of the terms you have used come under this category. Use the ** wildcard symbol (# in Ebscohost, ? in Ovid Online) to retrieve both variants e.g.

- *p#ediatric, behavio#r, organi#ation*

Have you used Proximity Operators?

Do any of your search terms make sense if they appear in a different order e.g.

- *health promotion/promotion of health*
- *patient experience/experience of patients*

If they do you can place a Proximity Operator (*N* in **EBSCOhost, adj** in **Ovid Online**) to enhance your search e.g.

- *health N promot*^*

Is the width of your proximity operators suitable?

A number should be placed after the Proximity Operator to indicate how far apart your search terms can appear within a study in order for a database to retrieve it e.g.

- *health N5 promot*^ is will retrieve studies where the term health appears within 5 words of promote, promotion etc. in any order.

Consider if increasing the number, to broaden your search, may still pick up relevant studies.
Have you used speech/quotation marks when using phrases as search terms? (not applicable in Ovid Online)

If you use a phrase as a search term it should be surrounded by speech/quotation marks to make your search more specific e.g.

- "National Health Service"

Are full terms and abbreviations used where relevant?

If your search term has an abbreviation you should use this as well as the main term e.g.

- National Health Service or NHS

Are there any spelling errors?

The database won’t retrieve relevant studies if a search term is spelt incorrectly.

Are there any syntax errors e.g. an Ovid symbol being used in an EBSCO database?

Ensure that the symbol for search techniques such as finding variant spellings and using proximity operators apply to the platform you are using.
Search History

This section refers to your use of the Search History function to combine your searches in relation to the different concepts of your question.

Have your Subject Heading and Keyword (free text) searches been combined correctly, for each concept of your question?

For each concept of your question, your Subject Heading and Keyword searches should be merged using the OR button to give you one full search e.g.

{NB} For some concepts of your topic, Subject Heading/MESH terms may not be available.
Each of your merged concepts should then be combined using the **AND** button to retrieve your final result.
Is it possible to retrieve relevant results by searching using different combinations from your search concepts?

For some questions it may be possible to have more than one set of relevant results e.g.

If your question is comparing intervention A against intervention B you can have results which cover:

- Both intervention A and intervention B
- Only intervention A
- Only intervention B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search query</th>
<th>Search modes</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S18  S9 AND S12 AND S15</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S17  S4 AND S12 AND S15</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (455)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S16  S4 AND S9 AND S12 AND S15</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S15  S13 OR S14</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (3,581,762)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S14  AB &quot;child&quot; or &quot;infant&quot; or &quot;pediatric&quot; or &quot;teenage&quot; or &quot;adolescent&quot;</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (1,403,004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S13  (Mh &quot;Infant&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Child&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Child, Preschool&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Adolescent&quot;)</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (3,103,515)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12  S10 OR S11</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (104,145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11  AB headache or migraine</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (79,864)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10  (Mh &quot;Headache&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Tension-Type Headache&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Headache Disorders, Primary&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Cluster Headache&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Headache Disorders&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Migraine Disorders&quot;)</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (52,478)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9   S5 OR S6 OR S7 OR S8</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (200,836)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8   AB ( drugs or pharmac* or medic*) N5 (&quot;over the counter&quot; or prescrin) OR AB (acetaminophen or analgin or paracetamol or paracipri or aspirin)</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (119,803)</td>
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<tr>
<td>S7   (Mh &quot;Aspirin&quot;)</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (43,407)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6   (Mh &quot;Acetaminophen&quot;)</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (17,286)</td>
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<tr>
<td>S5   (Mh &quot;Pharmaceutical Preparations&quot;) OR (Mh &quot;Prescription Drugs&quot;)</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (57,907)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4   S1 OR S2 OR S3</td>
<td>Boolean/Phrase</td>
<td>View Results (81,071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3   AB &quot;mind body therapy&quot; or mindfulness or yoga or &quot;therapeutic touch&quot; or &quot;tai j&quot; or &quot;tai chi&quot; or &quot;relaxation therapy&quot; or psychodrama or &quot;mental healing&quot; or meditat or &quot;laughter therapy&quot; or hypno or &quot;autogenic training&quot; or &quot;breathing exercises&quot; or qigong or acupuncture or &quot;musculoskeletal manipulat&quot; or &quot;soft tissue therapy&quot; or massage</td>
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<td>View Results (50,103)</td>
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Limits/Filters

This section applies if you have added any database limits or filters to your final search results.

Have you used any search limits e.g. publication date, publication type, age group? Are they relevant to your inclusion criteria?

You should only use limits/filters if they are part of your inclusion criteria.