Searching the literature – tips and techniques

Liaison Team
Walton Library
Define your topic

Be clear on what you are asking

Keep the question as simple but as specific as possible

Analyse the elements of your question

main subjects or concepts:
- population group - sex, age range
- publication language
- publication date
Sample question

“What has been published in English since 2010 on the relationship between social media use and adolescent mental well-being?”
Analyse the question...

subject 1  social media
subject 2  adolescent well-being
population group (adolescents)
publication type journal articles
publication language English
publication date 2010-2019
Your main concepts

Make a list of all your main search terms

Check for alternate terms and synonyms

Use thesauri and dictionaries,

Use controlled vocabularies (MeSH headings)

Most indexes and cataloguers will use MeSH

MeSH is NOT just medical terminology
Identifying keywords – the effectiveness of social stories in work with children who have autism

- Effectiveness
  - Success
  - Effect
  - Performance
  - Scores
  - Results

- Social stories
  - Social articles
  - Social information
  - Social cues

- Children
  - Young children
  - Primary education
  - Secondary education
  - Kids

- Autism
  - Autistic spectrum
  - Autistic spectrum disorder
  - ASD
  - Asperger
Controlled vocabularies

- Leg
  - Knee
  - Ankle
  - Foot
    - Forefoot
    - Heel
      - Metatarsus
      - Tarsus
Explode

Articles are indexed using the narrowest subject headings possible

The explode function permits simultaneous searching of both a broad subject and the narrower subjects classed under it
Focus

Subject headings can be major or minor

Focusing a search will only retrieve papers where your subject headings are major headings
Explode v Focus

Explode determines the subject coverage of your search

Focus determines the importance of those subjects in your search

You can do both if appropriate
Population Group

Age

Sex

Race

Geographical location
Dates

How far back do you need to go?

Earliest electronic resources are in the 40's but most go back to 80's

Might need to consult printed indexes

- Recent work? Use review articles, Cochrane, Web of Science, Scopus
Choose your sources

Journals

- Probably your biggest source
- E-journals are searchable
- Databases easy to use
- May have to use printed indexes for older material

Accessing journals- Library [homepage](#)
Searching the Literature

Books/Textbooks

Not so up-to-date, but...
.A good search covers all the bases!
Good for bibliographies

Use:
British Library -http://catalogue.bl.uk/
Amazon - Amazon web store
Searching the Literature

Grey literature

eg. theses, conference proceedings, government or organisation reports

Use:
Zetoc (tocs for conference papers and journals)
Index of conference proceedings (on BL catalogue)
Proquest Dissertations and Theses (Library databases)

Grey Literature Guide at Newcastle University Library
Databases

Wide range of databases in medical/biomedical sciences

Available via Library homepage
Useful Databases

Medline – US, 1946-, biomedical/clinical sciences
Embase – European, 1974-, toxicology, pharmacology, interventions
PsycInfo – 1806 -, psychology, psychiatry, behavioural sciences
CINAHL – 1981 – nursing and allied health
Scopus – 54m records (33m back to 1996. 21m back to 1823), multi-disciplinary
WoK – 1900 -, 40m references, multi-disciplinary
Databases Using Controlled Vocabularies

Medline/Cochrane Library – MeSH

PsycInfo – APA thesaurus

Embase - Emtree
“Keyword” Searching

Web of Science (Web of Knowledge)

Scopus
Apply search techniques

Applying search techniques....

Boolean logic - AND, NOT, OR

To make your searches more or less specific
AND

BOTH of the search terms are present

Diabetes Type I

Diabetes Type II
Searching the Literature

AND using three concepts

- Diabetes Type I
- Insulin
- Diabetes Type II
**OR**

At least one of the search terms is present.

- **Diabetes Type I**
- **Diabetes Type II**
NOT

Only one of the terms is present

- Diabetes Type I
- Diabetes Type II
- Insulin
Getting round word variants - truncation

Most databases use *
So, disease*
returns disease, diseases, diseased
Be careful, rat*
returns rat, rats, rate, rationalise, ratio, ratify…
Google

Extremely powerful search engine
INCREDBLY advanced searching technology built in, as well as an advanced searching capacity,

Google search operators - Many search features:
Advanced Search for Google
and
Google search operators
During the search process

Re-run searches

Sign up to alerting services
360 degree searching

Older articles: chase the references

Important article

Newer articles: find citing articles
Chase particular author
Keeping Records

Use bibliographic software:

EndNoteX9
EndNote

- Computer program designed specifically for storing and managing bibliographic references
  - Personal databases of journal articles, book references and web page references
- Produce reference lists in Word documents
  - Add in-text citations
  - Produce an automatic end-of-text bibliography
  - Easily change the style
How can I get EndNote?

• Available on all cluster PCs

• Off-campus via the Remote Application Service (full desktop version, as on campus)

• EndNote Web (reduced functionality compared to desktop version but free online). Can be sync’d with desktop version.

• Purchase personal copy via IT Service's software deals (£98)

• Register & Download a copy from NUIT - for length of course
Practice

Choose a database and practice your own search
Library Help
Live chat 24/7

Library Help online at libhelp.ncl.ac.uk