



**Canterbury Medical Library  
University of Otago, Christchurch**

# Some Tips for using **CINAHL**

**CINAHL is found at**

**<http://www.uoc.otago.ac.nz/departments/library/databases.htm>**

**Choose *Ebsco Databases*, then *CINAHL Searching***

## Planning a search

Define your topic and identify the key concepts

For each concept, note any synonyms (alternate terms and spellings)

Search for each concept separately - (Combine these sets of similar subject matter with **OR** to form **one** set)

Combine each of these **group sets** with **AND**

## Choosing a search option in CINAHL

### Using a single line in the Advanced Search box

If you are familiar with searching Medline via OVID, then you will find that using the Advanced Search option will enable you to search with a similar technique in CINAHL (via EBSCOhost).

Type a keyword or words into a single line of the box and ensure that the 'Suggest Terms' box is ticked. See page 3 of this handout.

This type of search will go to the CINAHL Headings list of suggested subject terms and the subject terms listed will reflect the topic that you entered. A keyword search can still be conducted at this screen – tick the box at the bottom of the page where the words that you typed appear, followed by (*Search as Keyword*). Check Page 7, for the 'Things to remember' when conducting a keyword search

### Using multiple lines in the Advanced Search box

To use the several lines in the Advanced Search option, (i.e. by selecting fields and setting AND/OR/NOT), you should first remove the tick from the '**Suggest Terms**' box. This will allow you to conduct a **keywords** search.

It is possible to specify in which section of a record that the words typed should be found. i.e. words in the subject field, or the title field. Check Page 11, for the 'Things to remember' when conducting a keyword search.

All **Advanced Searches** will be available under the **Search History/Alerts tab** and can therefore be combined with other searches.

### Using Basic Search (Best used for 'single-term searching')

Because the Search History tab is not available in **Basic Search**, each subsequent search will **not** be able to be combined with any earlier searches. However, listed to the left in the Search Results will be a selection of subject terms that can be used to narrow the search. If you wish to combine several searches together using AND, OR or NOT, use **Advanced Search**.

## Using Advanced Search

- Ensure that the 'Suggest Subject Terms' box has a **tick** in it. Type a topic, click Search and a list similar to the one below will appear.

Keyword Publications CINAHL Headings Cited References More

Searching: CINAHL | [Choose Databases >](#)

Suggest Subject Terms

intravenous therapy in Select a Field (optional) Search

and in Select a Field (optional)

and in Select a Field (optional) [Add Row](#)

[Advanced Search](#) | [Visual Search](#) | [Search History/Alerts](#) | [Preferences >](#)

- Before beginning each new search, delete any search terms left in the search box.

CINAHL Headings | [View Tutorials](#)

Results For: intravenous therapy

Check box to view subheadings. | Click linked term for tree view.

Search Term	Explode (+)	Major Concept	Scope
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Intravenous Therapy</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Home Intravenous Therapy</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Intravenous Therapy Department</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Intravenous Therapy Equipment and Supplies</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Search Database

**Check a box** to select a subject heading to begin building your search strategy.

- Place a tick to the left of the most relevant subject term, and the display will change to the 3 column view on the following page.

## Using Advanced Search (continued - three column view)

### The left column

Tick **Explode** - if you want to include all terms that are subdivisions of a more general heading  
 eg. "Fluid resuscitation" is a subdivision of the heading "Intravenous therapy"

Tick **Major Concept** - if your chosen heading must be the key focus of all articles retrieved

### The centre column

Tick one or more of the available subheadings, or the box beside **Include All Subheadings**

### The right column

This shows the search settings that you have been creating.  
 Click on the green **Search Database** button when you have made all your choices.

Clicking on the **blue** heading itself will display the tree or hierarchy of subject headings. This can be useful to see how a term fits with others. The search can be continued from this screen as described in 'the left column' above.

## Combining two or more searches

- Each search will display in a list. If not, click on the **Search History/Alerts** tab to re-display all previous searches.

The screenshot shows the EBSCOHOST search interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: **New Search**, **Publications**, **CINAHL Headings**, **Cited References**, and **More**. The current search is for **CINAHL**. Below the search bar, there are three input fields for search terms, each with a dropdown menu for selecting a field. The interface includes a **Search** button and a **Clear** button. Below the search bar, there are links for **Basic Search**, **Advanced Search**, **Visual Search**, **Search History/Alerts**, and **Preferences**.

In the lower section, there is a table of search history with columns for **Search ID#**, **Search Terms**, and **Search Option**. Two searches are listed: S2 and S1. Both have checkboxes in the first column that are checked. Below the table, there are three buttons: **Search with AND**, **Search with OR**, and **Delete Search**.

Tick sets to combine then Click **Search with AND** to combine different aspects of your search.  
This will narrow your search.

Tick sets to combine then click **Search with OR** if combining synonyms and alternate spellings to form a concept group.  
This will widen your search.

## About the CINAHL Headings screen

### How to use the 'explode' tick box.

Explode 

When this box is ticked, all more specific subject headings **will also** be included.



If it is **not** ticked - you may **miss important articles**

Indexers always apply the only the most specific headings that are possible for each article, and do not add general terms.

Therefore, an article about treating a thumb injury, would **not** have any indexing under 'hand'.

However, the Explode facility can use a hierarchy or grouping system to include all the more precise headings.

In this example, placing a tick in the Explode box next to **hand** will also include any articles that were indexed with **fingers** or **thumb**.



A screenshot of a heading hierarchy in CINAHL. It shows a tree structure where 'Arm' is the parent heading, with sub-headings 'Elbow' and 'Forearm'. 'Hand' is a sub-heading of 'Arm' and is selected with a tick box. Under 'Hand', the sub-headings 'Fingers' and 'Thumb' are also selected with tick boxes. The 'Arm' heading is preceded by a minus sign (-).

Try searching for **Antibiotics** to see another example - (articles on the individual antibiotics have separate entries and will not be included unless **antibiotics** is 'exploded').

### When to use subheadings

A subheading such as -adverse effects or -drug therapy or -diagnosis...is attached to articles that concentrate on certain aspects of a topic. The subheadings available, differ according to the topic. One or more of these can be selected, or - if no selection is made, then the entire set (or ALL SUBHEADINGS) is automatically selected.

**WARNING** - In CINAHL, most articles include general information across all aspects of the topic and therefore are not assigned a subheading. If you choose one or more subheadings, you will **not** see any of these general articles even though they may include useful information on that aspect. Only the most specific articles are assigned a subheading.

## Effective keyword searching

If you have been unable to identify a subject heading for your topic, then you can use keyword searching by removing the tick from the **Suggest Subject terms** box.

### Things to remember -

- Using a keyword search without the **Suggest Terms** box ticked, you will retrieve the **exact word or phrase**, wherever it occurs in any article title or abstract.
- For a comprehensive and effective search using this technique, you need to search for **all** synonyms and alternate spellings and related words. Then, combine these using **OR**
- Articles retrieved from a keyword search are not necessarily about the word or phrase. Think about the many meanings of the word '**discharge**'
- For a **comprehensive search** you should use BOTH keyword and subject heading searches, then combine them with **OR**
- **Truncation** - A useful way to include all the word variations is to truncate the word. Truncation uses the stem of the word and a symbol (usually the asterisk \*) to retrieve all words that begin with the part of the word that you have typed.

**For example, hospit\* will retrieve hospital, hospitals, hospitalised, hospitalized... etc.**

## Refining the search to produce more useful results

Searches can be limited in several ways.

The **Search History/Alerts** tab displays all searches. To revise any search in the list, use the **Edit link** in the **Actions** column for the relevant search line. After setting the required limits, click the Search button found at bottom left of screen.

Various settings in the **Refine Search** column (which displays beside the list of search results) can be used – but only with your most recent search line.

CINAHL can be limited by language, publication year, clinical trials, research or age-groups, among others.

It is always better to avoid applying too many limits at once. In general, apply year and language limits first. Then apply any other limit.

## Viewing, printing, emailing your results

Your latest results will appear below the Search History/Alerts box or click on **View results** to see articles from an earlier search.

If full text is available, either of these will appear below the reference.



Click onto an individual reference to see the abstract and other information about the article.

To create a list of selected references (for emailing or printing), click the **Add to folder** button.

All printing or emailing is done from the **Folder View**

You can select all or some references to print, email or export. Where a journal is available in full text, the link will also be visible in the folder view.

## Finding articles listed in your search results

Once your search is complete the next step is to locate relevant articles from the list of references in your search results.

To find what journals are held within the library system use the library's online catalogue available from: <http://otago.lconz.ac.nz/>

Sometimes it is quicker to go straight to the library's electronic journals portal: <http://zz5mw5zc7z.search.serialssolutions.com/>

However, the electronic journals portal will only tell you if the title you enter is available as an electronic journal. If the library only subscribes to the paper version of the journal, or the journal has changed its title you may not get a result. If you don't find the journal you want in the electronic journals portal then try a search of the catalogue.

See the library's tip sheet on finding electronic journals:  
[A brief guide to the Canterbury Medical Library electronic journals](#)

## Training and assistance

Help in planning or conducting your search is available.

Phone 80504 or email [referencecml.uoc@otago.ac.nz](mailto:referencecml.uoc@otago.ac.nz)  
to arrange a training session at the **Canterbury Medical Library**