Advanced Searching in OvidSP

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Preparing to search: accessing the OvidSP databases

Click Medline or Ovid Databases from the library database page.

At the pop-up, select the appropriate database to search from the list.

Click on ☰ for information to help you choose the best database for your needs.

Searching one database at a time is strongly recommended when you are using Advanced Search.
**Advanced search mode in OvidSP**

Advanced Search is the preferred option for conducting a comprehensive, effective and well-defined search or literature review. The information in this handout deals with the Advanced Search mode in Medline only; other databases available from OvidSP have similar functionality.

Advanced search uses a combination of subject headings and/or keywords. A structured step-by-step approach is necessary for a comprehensive search.

**Preparing your search strategy: deciding on your search terms**

Example topic: Rehabilitation of low back pain to enable patients to return to work

Look at your search topic and separate the concepts. For a complex topic, use a concept box to record the different spellings, synonyms or professional terms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words from the original topic</th>
<th>Synonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rehabilitation</td>
<td>physiotherapy ; physical therapy ; occupational therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low back pain</td>
<td>lower back pain ; lumbar strain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>return to work</td>
<td>employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In your search strategy, you can represent these concepts in two ways: subject headings and keywords

**Subject headings**

- a consistent way to retrieve all references on a topic regardless of the wording used by individual authors
- increased retrieval of relevant articles

**Keywords**

- concepts for which there is no appropriate subject heading e.g. specific or very new terms
- searches for words or phrases in a citation but you will have to consider all the various ways of describing a concept and alternative spellings and possible grammatical forms of words.
- truncation (use of a symbol at the end of the stem of a word to include all the possible word endings) is a useful strategy. The OvidSP truncation symbol is * e.g. adolescent* would retrieve records containing the words adolescent, adolescents and adolescence.
- to search by keyword only, remove the tick from the Map Term to Subject Heading box (under the search box).
Starting your search: search for a subject heading

Enter a single word or phrase into the search box. Click Search.

Notice that the Map Term to Subject Heading box is ticked; this means you are doing a subject heading search.

Choosing a subject heading: the mapping display

You are taken to a display of subject headings which best match the term you searched on (called mapping). Here you can select the subject heading that best matches your concept, in this case Low Back Pain.

Identify the most relevant subject heading from those suggested, but do not click Continue. Instead, click on the underlined subject heading closest to your concept to link through to the ‘Tree’.
Choosing a subject heading: the Tree, Explode and Focus

In the Tree, subject heading terms are arranged in hierarchical structures, ranked from most broad to most specific. The Tree display shows your chosen term in context, so you can view headings related to it. The narrower or more specific headings may be indented: click on the + sign beside a heading to see these.

Explode
Tick the Explode box next to the broadest term which describes your concept if you wish to include the narrower or more specific headings related to it, e.g. explode Back Pain to include Failed Back Surgery Syndrome and Low Back Pain.

Focus
Tick the Focus box if you wish to retrieve only articles where that subject is the main focus of the article.

You can use both Explode and Focus together, i.e. choose a wider range of terms, each of which has to be one of the main topics of an article. Click Continue.

Choosing subheadings

Subheadings may further refine your search to more relevant results by concentrating on one specific aspect of your concept; however they should be used with care as they can be too narrow. If in doubt, include them all by clicking Continue.

You now have a set of results for your first search/concept.
Adding additional search terms/concepts

Repeat the above steps to search for the other concepts. Each new search will appear on a separate numbered line i.e. as a separate set.

Combining Search Terms using AND or OR

You now have 3 separate sets of search results which are not related and must be combined to find articles containing all 3 concepts.

Select the sets you want to combine by ticking the check box then Combine selections with AND. If you combined these sets using OR, you would find articles that contain any of the terms but not necessarily all of them together.

Your new set contains articles with Low Back Pain AND Rehabilitation AND return to work.
Refining your search results using Limits

Limits (e.g. by date, language, age group, publication type) help you to focus your search on a key patient population, publication type or date range.

Limits should be applied only after you have combined all your sets. Apply limits one at a time so that you know what effect each one is has on your search result.

From the main Search page you can choose from popular limits e.g. English Language, Humans, or Publication Year: select the limit you want then click Search.

To see a broader range of Limits click Additional Limits e.g. Publication types such as controlled clinical trials or practice guidelines, Clinical Queries for more robust studies, or Age Groups,
Reviewing your search results: finding the full-text of articles

You now have the results of your search. If you cannot see all the steps of your search strategy click **EXPAND** to the right of the search history.

Scroll down (to see the final set) or click the relevant Display link in the Search History box to see the retrieved references.

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<td>Authors</td>
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<td>Steenstra, Jan L; Knol, Dirk L; Bergsma, Paulien M; Anema, Johannes R; van Meijelko, Ellen F; de Vet, Henrica C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>What works best for whom? An exploratory subgroup analysis in a randomized, controlled trial on the effectiveness of a workplace intervention in low back pain patients on return to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Spine. 2012(1);128:9, 2012 May 29.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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**Ovid Full Text or Full text or PDF link:** use to go directly to full text

**Article Linker or Library Holdings:** to find if the library holds the journal or article.

**Complete Reference:** displays the full citation; it is not a link to full-text.

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**Find Similar:** searches concepts and synonyms from the title in other article titles.

**Find Citing Articles:** shows articles only in journals published by Ovid which have cited the original article.
Managing your search results: printing, emailing, exporting

Select the references you want from the results by ticking the box next to the article title. Clicking on **Keep Selected** will save your selected results into your search history for the duration of your current session.

Options to Print, Email or Export selected references are given at the top of the search results.

Selecting Print, Email or Export opens a new window which gives options for preferred settings.

Print your results in the format you want. Export citations to EndNote or Word or other formats.

**Saving your search**

**Save** your search strategy (for a temporary period, permanently or as an email alert) by clicking **Save Search History**. Saving searches requires the creation of a personal account.

Follow the instructions on the Personal Account Login screen after clicking **Save search history**.

To retrieve your search next time you log in to the database, click **View Saved**.

For further assistance please see our online Libguides: (http://otago.libguides.com/whmhslibrary)

Or contact:
The Reference team during office hours on
04 385 5561 x5561 | medlibref.wsmhs@otago.ac.nz
The big picture: search strategy ➔ results

- Formulate your question
- Separate concepts in your question
- Formulate your search strategy
- Choose database
- Find subject headings for each
  - Check Scope
  - Notes
  - Use Tree
    - Structure
    - Use Explode / Focus if necessary
  - Apply subheadings if appropriate
- Use text/keywords if necessary
- Combine sets using AND or OR (Boolean)
- Apply limits
- Evaluate your results
- Good 😊
- Not good 😞
- Use the data
- Results off topic?
  - Look at subject headings of relevant citations and repeat search incorporating the best of these
- Too many results?
  - Try again using focus, subheadings, limits
- Too few results?
  - Try again using text words or fewer subheadings
- Still no good?
  - Ask a librarian! 😞