Literature Searching

Pre-searching

- **Planning.** Take time to consider your topic or research question and plan your search strategy to find the best journal articles.
- **Google.** Use Google only for quick background information to get a feel for the topic before you start your main search in Summon or a specialist database.
- **Summon.** Use Summon for quick and easy one-stop searching across all UCS collections including books and journal articles, with direct linking to full-text.

Defining your topic or research question

- Summarise your topic into a phrase or short sentence to help you identify the key ideas and concepts.
- Words like **role of, impact on, led to, discuss, analyse, describe, implications for** etc. are not key concepts and are not usually helpful in searching.

Selecting databases to search

- **Summon.** Use for quick searching across all UCS collections including books, e-books and journals.
- **Specialist nursing databases.** Use these for more in-depth or systematic searching; you should aim to search several including Cinahl (Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health).

Developing your search terms

Using the right search terms is the key to effective searching. To search effectively you should use various types of search terms outlined below. Use an online thesaurus to help you find alternative search words.

- Acronyms and abbreviations e.g. use **QOL** for **quality of life**
- Alternative spellings e.g. use **anemia** for **anaemia**
- Broader terms e.g. use **body weight** for **obesity**
- Narrower terms e.g. use **melanoma** for **cancer**

Using different terminology can also be very helpful:

- Differences in terminology across national boundaries e.g. for **accident and emergency** use **emergency room**
- Differences in spellings e.g. for **anaemia** use **anemia**
- Old and new terminology e.g. for **mongolism** use **downs syndrome**
- Brand and generic names e.g. for **coumadin** use **warfarin**
- Lay and medical terminology e.g. for **stroke** use **cerebrovascular accident**

Broadening and narrowing searches using AND, OR, NOT operators

Boolean operators are very useful for broadening or narrowing your search results:

- **AND** narrows (finds articles with **all** words) and is used for combining different concepts e.g. **diet AND cancer**
- **OR** broadens (finds articles with **any** word) and is used for finding similar words e.g. **diet OR nutrition**
- **NOT** narrows (finds articles that **exclude** a word) e.g. **nursing NOT children. TIP!** (Use **AND NOT** when using Science Direct).
Truncation and wildcard searching
Use * to find alternative word endings to increase your search results:
- Nurs* finds Nurse, nurses, nursing
- Child* finds Child, children, childhood, childbirth
- Midwi* finds Midwife, midwives, midwifery
- Manag* finds Manager, management, managing

Searching for phrases
There are several ways to search for phrases:

Pain management
- Words in phrases may or may not be found together as a fixed string. Words might become dissociated and appear in different parts of the citation with the result that some results may not be relevant.

Pain N1 management
- Finds pain within one words of management. As word order is disregarded, this might also find management of severe pain.

Tip! Use N1 for Cinahl and N/1 for Proquest databases and W/1 for ScienceDirect

“Pain management”
- Using quotation marks searches for the phrase as a fixed string which may limit the number of results you find.

Conducting your search
- Use the advanced search option for the most flexible search option. This allows you to enter each different concept on a separate search row.
- Search within the article citation - words in the title, abstract and subject headings fields. Citation search is the default search setting for Cinahl; however when using any Proquest databases you should switch from searching Anywhere to Anywhere except full-text to avoid returning too many irrelevant results.
- If you need to focus further, search for words in title (= title of article).
- Avoid limiting search results to full-text as your search results will not include recent articles on which there are embargos on full-text.

Refining your search
- Limiting to full-text – this will limit to articles with direct links to full-text. However, you may then lose citations of articles which you could easily locate in other UCS collections.
- Time frame - do you need to limit to the last five or ten years?
- Language - do you need to exclude foreign language material?
- Other filters - most databases offer expert filters e.g. publication, age range or gender.

Improving your search results
- Check your spelling. Are there any typing errors?
- Has truncation been correctly applied e.g. comput* (not comp*) for computing to avoid finding information on companies
- Have you used the operators AND (narrows) and OR (broadens) correctly?
- Are there any more synonyms or alternative words you could use to broaden your search?

Considering your search results
- Is the item appropriate to your topic or subject area and is it sufficiently up-to-date?
- Read the abstract of the article for a brief summary of the content. This will give you a quick overview of research design and findings.
- For books, browse the contents page to check that the topics covered are relevant. Read the introduction and conclusion for a quick overview of the direction and purpose of the book.
- Articles may need to be critically appraised for trustworthiness, value and relevance. Look for appropriate research design, data collection, bias, sampling strategy and try to spot any drawbacks in the research. Use the CASP tools at http://www.casp-uk.net/research topic and plan your search strategy to find the best journal articles.