Literature searching:

Evaluate your findings

**Are your search results relevant?**

Once you have refined your search results you should scan them to check if your search strategy needs revising to improve them.

- Do the results look relevant? Do you need to remove or add any extra search terms?
- Are there any words that you could exclude from your results by using the NOT operator?
- Do you need to tweak your use of search techniques e.g. Boolean operators, truncation or proximity operators?
- Are there any other more appropriate databases or sources that could be searched?

**TIP!** If your efforts do not uncover documents specific to the subject, ask for some help with searching, or ask for guidance from your supervisor about the suitability of your topic.

**Do your search results match your inclusion and exclusion criteria?**

Once you have arrived at results which look relevant, you should explore these further to ensure that you do not include inappropriate material in your literature review.

- Start by reading the abstract to get a sense of the content of the article and the extent to which it is relevant to your review.
- If you have used one of the health frameworks such as PICO or PEO to structure your questions this task will be a lot easier. This will help you refer back to your inclusion and exclusion criteria and check that the material is directly relevant to your review.
- Predominantly you will need to consider the subject content, for example if your topic is **dietary control in the treatment of attention deficit disorder**, do not include general material on **behavioural disorders**.

**TIP!** Once you have completed your review you should still continue the process of searching for literature.
Evaluate your findings

Start critically reading each of your sources. It may be easier to save difficult or poorly written articles to last when you have more familiarity with your subject.

Scan selected articles quickly in order not to get bogged down in detail. Note down key points such as:

- What are the authors’ academic reputation?
- Identify the research question, the findings and how these were interpreted.
- Are the authors objective or can you spot bias?
- Is contrary or contradictory data considered and discussed?

Analyze, interpret and synthesize the literature

- Critical appraisal is the process of carefully and systematically examining research to judge its trustworthiness, value and relevance in a particular context.

- Start by establishing the main topics within each article or source. Then identify the methods used, themes, ideas, theories, approaches to the topic that have emerged from your reading. To be able to compare the work of different researchers you will need to have a thorough understanding of their work.

- When you have finished your overview of all relevant literature you will need to synthesize this into the review so that all the threads can be drawn together and common themes identified. The aim is to shed new light on or find a new perspective on the question.

Critiquing health research

Evidence-based nursing and health care practice requires the critical appraisal of evidence so that it can be used to inform and promote clinically effective care and decision-making.

For health research you will need to use specific critical appraisal tools such as CASP at http://www.casp-uk.net/

Tip! Critiquing tools are not meant to replace considered thought and judgement when reading a paper – they are simply there as guides and aide memoires.