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 broad searching across all books, e-books and journal articles purchased by University of Suffolk. Use Summon instead of Google Scholar to ensure seamless linking to full-text. Web resources are not included.

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 University of Suffolk collections including books, e-books and journal articles.
- **Specialist databases.** Use these for more advanced searching; you should aim to search several to ensure your search is comprehensive. Cinahl is particularly recommended for nursing and 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 *geriatric* use *older people*
- 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.*
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

Conducting your search

- Use the advanced search options for the most flexible searching as this allows you to enter each different concept on a separate search row.

- Start by searching within the article citation (i.e. words in the title, abstract and subject headings). Citation search is the default search setting for Cinahl. However, when using any Proquest database it is recommended that you switch from searching Anywhere to Anywhere except full-text to avoid returning too many irrelevant results.

- If you need to focus further, search one or more search strings as words in title (title of article).

- Do not limit search results to full-text only as you will lose articles with DOI and other links to full-text.

Refining your search

- Limiting to full-text – not recommended as you will lose articles with DOI and other indirect links to full-text.

- 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?

Evaluating 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 the content e.g. 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.

For more help with searching see the Basic Search Guide http://libguides.uos.ac.uk/search-guide which includes links to videos showing how to search Summon, Cinahl, Proquest and Medline databases.