1. BEFORE YOU START SEARCHING

It is useful to identify and list the key words and concepts you are interested in. Be aware of:

- **Synonyms** - words that mean the same or similar thing. Make a list. Authors may choose to use one particular term rather than another in their articles.

- **Related terms** and **different word endings/plurals**. e.g. teenager, teen, youth, juvenile, adolescent

- If you are interested in a **particular ailment, illness or health condition**, identify the different names that are used for it - medical and more general (formal/informal). e.g. heart attack / myocardial infarction

- If you are interested in a particular treatment, identify the **medication** or **treatment** and the variety of names for it.

- Make a note of **acronyms** and **abbreviations**. Including these in your search strategy ensures you are doing a thorough search.

- **Different spellings and terminology**. American English spellings and terminology are worth including in your list of search terms. e.g. colour / color, behaviour / behavior, lift / elevator

- Do the searching gradually in steps. Keep a record of **keywords** and your **search strategies**. These are an essential part of your research. They need to be described and recorded in your final dissertation as proof of a **systematic** and **thorough** approach.

- **Most databases** allow you to create your own individual account where you can save your searches/results, print out the search strategy and set up email alerts to update you on up to date articles in your area of interest.

ONCE YOU START SEARCHING

Break your topic or research question into its **component parts** and search for each separately.

Search using **each term** separately and look at the number of results to see which are most commonly used.
Do this for each part or concept within your topic of interest or research question. This gives you more flexibility in the way you can combine concepts together at a later stage.

2. **COMBINING SEARCHES - When to use AND, When to use OR**

Search using each term separately and look at the number of results to see which are most commonly used. You can later combine these using **OR** to include articles that contain any of the keywords, for a broad search. This is useful for synonyms, or terms that mean the same or similar.

For example: **X OR Y OR Z** retrieves results which have either term X or term Y or term Z in.

**Keywords** that broaden or narrow down your search. Combine these using **AND** to search for articles which include all terms to focus/narrow a search.

For example: **Q AND R AND S** retrieves results which contain all three terms Q, R and S.

3. **TRUNCATION AND WILDCARDS**

**Truncation**

To increase your search terms and help ensure all relevant articles are retrieved, you can use truncation, often denoted by the asterisk *.

Truncating a term will look for all words which start with the term you've entered, so is particularly good for variant endings and plurals.

- **teen* will find teen, teens, teenager, teenagers**
- **nurs* will find nurse, nurses, nursing, nursery**

**Wildcards**

Cinahl, Medline, AMED, and PsycInfo are on the Ebsco Portal. These use the following Wildcards:

- **?** is used to replace one character
- **#** is used to replace 1 or more character
- **colo#r** will find color as well as colour
- **beavio#r** will find behavior as well as behaviour
- **wom?n** will find woman or women

**REMEMBER:**

- **Spellings** - Many databases have an international scope. The literature (and spellings) will reflect this.
- **Additional Keywords** - Articles, and search results (especially abstracts) may indicate additional keywords you may not have identified, which you can add to your search strategy. You may modify your search strategy as your knowledge of your topic grows.
• **Keep a record** of your searches and results. You can insert your saved search strategy into your dissertation to demonstrate the **thorough** and **systematic** nature of your literature searching.

More information on putting together a research-focussed question, formulating a search strategy and conducting searches is available in a number of books on literature reviews which are held in the library. Some are also available as e-books. Search the [Library Catalogue](#) or look on the [Midwifery Library Subject Guide](#) to find a selection.