Search Tips: Complementary Health

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 **medications/treatments** and the variety of names for them. If you are interested in a particular treatment, identify the **medication** and the **ingredients/herbs it contains** (and the **various names** for those herbs).

- Consider **monitorable changes and improvements** in the ailment or condition. Identify the various terms for these changes. Research may not refer to treatments as curative, but may discuss measurable improvements in conditions.

- 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. If you are focussing on **Chinese medicine**, you need to ensure you identify **language, translation** and **spelling variations** too.

- Do the searching gradually in steps. You are required to demonstrate a **thorough** and **systematic** approach.
2. **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.

3. **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**.

**e.g. 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.

**e.g. Q AND R AND S** retrieves results which **contain all** three terms Q, R and S.

4. **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

**beHAVio#r** will find behavior as well as behavior

**wom?n** will find woman or women

**REMEMBER:**

- **Spellings** - Many databases have an international scope and the literature (and spellings) will reflect this. e.g American English variations. If you are focussing on Chinese medicine, you need to ensure you identify **language** and **spelling variations** too.
• **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.

• **Save your Searches and Results** – Many databases allow you to create your own personalised log in so you can save searches, set up email alerts (so you are automatically informed/updated on your topic), and save results.

• **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 [Complementary Health Library Subject Guide](#) to find a selection.