Advanced search tips for EBSCO databases (e.g. CINAHL Complete, Medline, PsycInfo)

Access off campus: If you want to access these databases off campus you will need to enter your University campus ID and password. From the Ebsco login page select your region/group as UK Higher Education, look for the University of Hull (Shibboleth) then enter your campus ID and password.

Selecting search terms

Before searching you need to identify the key concepts of your research area and think of alternative terms, spelling variants, word endings etc.

If you were looking at for e.g. how effective the nursing care is for teenagers with mental health conditions in a hospital setting, your key terms would be nursing, teenagers, mental health and hospital. You then need to consider alternative terms for each of these to search on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key term</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nursing</td>
<td>nurse</td>
<td>nurses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teenagers</td>
<td>teen, teens</td>
<td>adolescent, adolescence</td>
<td>young</td>
<td>pediatric, paediatric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mental health</td>
<td>mental illness, mental illnesses</td>
<td>mental disorder, mental disorders</td>
<td>depression etc. (you could search for individual conditions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospital</td>
<td>hospitals</td>
<td>ward, wards</td>
<td>acute</td>
<td>accident and emergency, A&amp;E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boolean searching

As databases hold such a huge amount of information, you need to know how to make your search as specific as possible so you don’t end up with hundreds (or thousands) of irrelevant results to wade through. The best way of doing this is to use a simple technique called “Boolean searching”.

1
Boolean searching allows you to combine or exclude keywords or phrases in your search. Boolean uses connector words such as AND, OR and NOT to do this.

**AND**
When you want to find articles containing two or more words or phrases, you should connect your keywords with AND. Using AND between keywords means that both terms must appear somewhere in the result. AND is used to narrow a search.

**OR**
Using OR means that an article will be retrieved if it contains either keyword. OR is best used to search for synonyms or alternative spellings. Because any one of these words could show up in your articles, OR broadens your search.

**NOT**
When you want to find articles excluding a word or phrase, you should connect the words in your search with NOT. Using NOT between keywords means that only results which contain the first term but NOT the second will appear. NOT is used to narrow a search. Be very cautious using this as you could potentially miss relevant papers.

**Advanced search tips**

**Phrase searching**
If two search terms are entered together the database will search for where these words appear within 5 words of each other in any order, so likely to be in the same sentence. So if mental health was searched this would pick up a sentence such as the health of the patient with mental disorders. If you need the terms to appear together you can add double quotation marks around the terms, e.g. “mental health”, which will then only search for where these terms appear next to each other in that order.

**Wildcard (?) and Truncation (*) Symbols**
Use the wildcard and truncation symbols to create searches where there are unknown characters, multiple spellings or various endings. Neither the wildcard nor the truncation symbol can be used as the first character in a search term.

**Truncation**
Truncation is a way of searching for all the words that begin with the same root and enables you to pick up all the variant endings. This will help you put in search terms once instead of having to type them in several times. Truncation is represented by an asterisk (*). To use truncation, enter the root of a search term and replace the ending with an *. For example, teen* to find the words teen, teens, teenager, teenagers
**Wildcards**

The **wildcard** is represented by a question mark ? or a pound sign #.

To use the ? wildcard, enter your search terms and replace each unknown character with a ?. This will find all citations of that word with the ? replaced by a letter.

For example, wom?n to find all citations containing woman or women.

To use the # wildcard, enter your search terms, adding the # in places where an alternate spelling may contain an extra character. This finds all citations of the word that appear with or without the extra character.

For example, type p#ediatric to find all citations containing pediatric or paediatric.

**Proximity**

You can use a proximity search to search for two or more words that occur within a specified number of words (or fewer) of each other in the databases.

The proximity operator uses the letter N and a number (to specify the number of words). The proximity operator is placed between the words that are to be searched, as follows:

Near Operator (N) – N3 finds the words if they are within three words of one another regardless of the order in which they appear.

For example, type child N3 abuse to find results that would match child abuse as well as the abuse of a child.

**Inputting search terms**

When you log into an Ebsco database such as Cinahl, the default screen is a basic search box. However, it is recommended that you use the Advanced search as this will enable you to combine your search terms appropriately and more effectively.

By clicking on the Advanced Search option you are presented with three search boxes to add your terms into. You can also Add rows by clicking on the symbol should you wish to add more terms.

The easiest way of entering your terms is to add all your alternatives in the same box, separating them with ‘or’. Each box defaults to have an AND in between search boxes. Searching in Select a Field option will search across the key fields of a record, e.g. title, abstract, subject, etc.
You can narrow this to specific fields e.g. **TI Title** which will narrow the search down considerably. Be aware that you could miss relevant papers though as your keywords may be in the abstract but not in the title.

Once the terms have been entered, click on **Search** and a list of results will be displayed containing the terms you've submitted.

In some cases you will find a direct link to the article in full text, simply click where it says **PDF Full Text**

In many cases though there will be just an abstract (a summary of the contents of the article), in these cases click on the **Find at Hull** button to check whether it is available through this library. This will either link direct to an electronic journal or take you through to the library catalogue where it may, or may not be available.

If you want, you can choose to retrieve only articles with a direct link to the full text on the database but remember there may be others available in full text via the Find at Hull button which would be missed.

**Further Tips:**

- By hovering over the Preview icon you can see a more detailed screen with the abstract
- By clicking on the title of the article you can see further information such as subject headings which may provide additional terms you can add to your search.
- Other useful features include the option to look at **Search History** where all the searches you have performed are displayed and an option to set up an alerting service to notify you of new articles in your chosen subject area.
- Adding items to a folder means all the useful references you see can be placed into an online folder so that when you’ve finished searching these can be printed out, saved, or downloaded into RefWorks or Endnote. It is recommended that you create an Ebsco account to save your searches for future reference. Otherwise the search and results will only be saved for the duration you are logged in.