# Not enough results? (ways to broaden your search)

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## Not enough?

Sometimes you can end up with lots of results, but there just aren’t any which answer your question.

On other occasions you put in your search terms and you end up with zero results.

Both scenarios can be equally frustrating.

Whichever one of these situations you find yourself in, this guide is for you.

## When I search on Google…

It’s really common for students to come to me and say that they can’t find any articles on their topic using the databases, but that when they do a Google search lots of relevant articles come up.

If you’re only using a piece of evidence to support an argument in your essay then this is fine, as you can just use one of the articles you find.

If however you’re doing an assignment where you have to document your search strategy or a dissertation where you have to search systematically across a range of databases, then you can’t do this.

But if you have found an article which is on your topic, however you’ve come across it, then that’s great. You can use that article to find more.

## Use the terms

Look at the article or articles which are on your topic

What terminology are they using?

All the database does is look for words. If the words you were searching on are in the title or the abstract of the article you have in front of you, that article would come up on the database.

Search for silver AND foam AND dressings and you get articles which contain those words

## Add more alternative terms

The most common reason for not finding anything is not using enough alternatives

For example

Your patient is 80 years young,

so in your search terms you’ve used elderly

But the articles on the topic don’t always use the word elderly, they talk about older adults or older people. Just changing this search line to read

Elder\* OR older people OR older adult\* OR older person OR geriatric OR senior\*

Gives you exactly the articles you were looking for.

## Try searching without it

If you can’t find anything at all, even if you add alternatives, take a step back and try searching without one of your keywords.

Your patient is a school age child in hospital with neuroblastoma. You want to find some evidence on how children in this situation might be feeling.

You try using keywords from your scenario and searching on

child\* OR paediatric OR pediatric OR young person

AND

hospital\* OR inpatient\* OR acute

AND

neuroblastoma

AND

thought\* OR feeling\* OR experience\*

## Try searching without it

Nothing relevant comes up.

Try taking out the search for neuroblastoma.

child\* OR paediatric OR pediatric OR young person

AND

hospital\* OR inpatient\* OR acute

AND

thought\* OR feeling\* OR experience\*

Immediately, on the first page, there are articles about how children feel and even on improving communication with children and their families.

If you look at the relevant articles, they use cancer and not the specific cancer name.

Just add a search for cancer OR oncology OR neoplasm\* with AND to get a good set of results.

## Try broadening your search

In the last example, looking at cancer, rather than the specific type of cancer, gave a better set of results.

This can be the case with all sorts of searches.

You’re reflecting on using a certain dressing on a leg ulcer - Zorflex.

There are only 2 articles on CINAHL on Zorflex.

But Zorflex is a type of antimicrobial dressing.

Try antimicrobial dressing\* instead, and get far more results.

You can compare different types of antimicrobial dressing.

Or compare antimicrobial with other types of dressing.

## Think outside the box

Something else that you can try, is looking at your subject in another way.

If you can’t find anything about ways of avoiding restraining a patient,

look instead at ways of dealing with treatment refusal.

If you are interested in controlling pain,

look for analgesia as well as pain management.

## There might just not be anything out there

If you’ve tried everything you can think of and you still aren’t getting any results, then the chances are that this is because there is nothing out there to find.

If you’re doing a dissertation, then talk to your supervisor as you may be able to do a research proposal on the topic instead of a literature review.

If you’re doing a reflective piece, you may be able to use ‘poetic licence’ to adapt the decision.

For an assignment or a reflection, sometimes finding there is no evidence out there is something which you can discuss.

## Further help

For more help with forming a search strategy look at the Constructing a Search Strategy guide

If you’re wondering what the \* means, then you can look at our guide Truncation and Wildcards

For more help with what AND and OR mean and when to use them look at our When to use AND and OR guide

If want to try your search on different databases, look at the database specific guides on our How to… guides page

If you have questions you’d like to ask a librarian…

## Any Questions?

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Ask for help if you need it.