

Constructing a search strategy

Use this guide to help you plan your database search

Step 1: Define your topic

Write your search question below:

Remember to choose a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow.

Step 2: Choose your keywords

Look at your search question; what are the keywords? Write them below:

Step 3: Identify alternative terminology

Think of alternative terms for your keywords:

Think about synonyms, acronyms, American terminology and alternative spellings. Remember, **truncation** (*) will find alternative word endings; **wildcards** (?) will find alternative spellings.

Step 4: Combining your keywords

Use Boolean operators to combine your keywords. Write your Boolean search strategy below:

Remember: OR groups all of your synonyms together for each keyword and makes your search broader; AND goes between each different keyword or group of synonyms to make your search narrower

Step 5: Limiting

Write the ways in which you might limit your search if you retrieve too many results:

How far back you wish to search? Do you only want articles with a UK focus? Can you select a specific age group within the database? Do you only want articles about a specific type of trial e.g. RCT?

Step 6: Choose your databases

Write a list of all the databases you want to use to obtain your results:

Once you have followed all these steps you are now ready to go and try out your search. For more advice or help, please contact the Health and Social Care Librarians:

healthcarelibrarians@brookes.ac.uk