

Constructing a search strategy using PICO

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 your keywords in this PICO framework:

Population / Problem	Intervention / Issue	Comparison / Context	Outcome

Step 3: Identify alternative terminology

Think of alternative terms for each of your keywords.

Think about synonyms, American terminology, acronyms and alternative spellings. **Truncation** (*) will find alternative word endings. **Wildcard** (?) will find alternative spellings.

Step 4: Combining your keywords

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

OR makes your search broader; AND makes your search narrower

Step 5: Limiting / excluding

How will you limit your search if you get too many results? What should be included or excluded? Think about age group, year of publication, geographical constraints, type of evidence, etc.

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 library: library@brookes.ac.uk

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