

Developing and Executing a Search Strategy

1. Compose your Research or Clinical Question

Use PICOS worksheet (patient group or problem, intervention, comparison, outcome, setting); or PICOT if time is an important factor

2. Identify Relevant Databases to Search

CINAHL, PubMed, Cochrane Databases or The Digital Pipeline (Formerly Databases for Alaskans)

3. Define Your Search Strategy

Break the question into concepts or elements that can be searched separately and later combined.

4. Use the Appropriate Thesaurus or Controlled Subject Terms if Available

For example in PubMed, use MeSH (Medical Subject Headings)

5. Consider Searching for Appropriate Synonyms and Text Words For Better Focus

Use these to search in non-indexed fields like the title and abstract fields. Use truncation, when appropriate.

6. Determine Boolean Operators

Use AND to retrieve records which contain both terms; use OR to retrieve records which contain either term; and use NOT to eliminate records with unwanted terms.

7. Apply Limit(s)

Limit to certain languages, age groups or publication types (peer-reviewed journals).

8. Run the Search and Critically Appraise the Results

Refine search if necessary, revisiting steps 4-7 according to your results

9. Revise the Strategy if Necessary and Run the Search Again

Consult a librarian if you need assistance. Call (907) 786-1870 or 1 888-997-7878 in AK.

10. Print, Save or E-mail Result List for Your Records or Order Full Text from HSIS

Use Order option in citation manager (CINAHL), Loansome Doc (PubMed), online forms on HSIS home page, fax print-out to 786-1608 or e-mail to ayhsis@uaa.alaska.edu. If information is needed fast for a clinical emergency, also alert HSIS at 786-1870.