Royal Papworth Hospital
Library Services

A step-by-step guide to conducting a basic literature search using a healthcare database

[Image of a signpost with questions like 'Who', 'What', 'When', 'Where', 'Why', 'How', 'QUESTIONS' and 'ANSWERS']

[Table showing search and databases options]
Before you log in, it is important to think about the different aspects of your topic.

**TIP:** Databases do not work well with sentences. You will need to identify and search separately for the **keywords/phrases** in your topic.

Having identified your keywords/phrases, consider synonyms, US spellings or alternative terminology e.g. medical vs general terms.

Example topic:

**Is the flu vaccine effective in reducing sick leave?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords/phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flu vaccine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick leave</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synonyms /Alternative terminology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influenza vaccine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time off work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenza immunisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenza immunization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After planning your search, access the databases at:

http://hdas.nice.org.uk
**Select your database**

Log in with your NHS Athens username and password. You are now in the NICE Healthcare Databases Advanced Search. Select the relevant database for your topic.

**Search your keywords**

Search each of your keywords/phrases individually: type them into the search box, make sure ‘Title and Abstract’ are selected and click on ‘Search’.

**TIP:** Put “quotation marks” around any phrases. This tells the database to search for the exact phrase rather than the words individually.
Having searched separately for your keywords/phrases relating to the first aspect of your topic (in this example: flu vaccine), you will now need to combine these search lines to produce a single set of results for this part of the search.

Tick the boxes next to each search line, select **OR** and click ‘**Combine**’.

You should now follow the same search process with the other aspects of your search topic.

In this example, the next aspect of the search is sick leave. Having searched for your keywords/phrases individually and combined with **OR** as above, the search history should now look like this:

The next step is to combine the different aspects (shown in green) of your topic using **AND**.

**TIP:** We search with **AND** to combine different parts of the search. We only use **OR** to combine keywords/phrases that are similar.
This produces a final search line combining the different aspects of the search topic. However, you may also wish to ‘limit’ the results, for example by date range or language.

In the search box, enter the line number (in this example 10) that you want to apply limits to and tick the ‘Limits’ box.

This will show the limits available in your chosen database. Use the headings to select the required limits and click on ‘Search’. In this example, the search has been limited by date (2011-2016) and language (English).
This produces a final line in your search strategy, with the limits applied to your search.

Once you are happy with your search, you should save your search strategy. This allows you to revisit your search at a later date, and makes it easier to save your results.

Give your search a name in the box above the search history and click on ‘Save Strategy’.

Scroll down the page to view your results, or click on ‘View Results’ in your final search line if they have not automatically appeared. You can change how the results are sorted, how many to view per page and show/hide abstracts.
As well as saving the search strategy, you can also save selected results.

As you review your results, tick those you wish to save and click on ‘Add to Saved’ at the bottom of each page before moving to the next page. If you move to the next page without saving you will lose your previous selections.

To export your results, scroll up to your search history and select ‘Export Options’.

This will display the format options next to each search line and display options at the bottom (e.g. short to show citation only, medium to include abstracts). Select your desired display options first and then click on your preferred output format for your ‘Saved Results’ line.

**TIP:** Not all articles will be immediately available to you. Contact the library to request any articles you require that do not have a full text option or if you have any problems accessing them. We can usually obtain articles for you through our interlibrary loan service, which is free of charge.
Library Services
Enquiry Desk

Usually staffed Monday - Friday: 9:00 – 16:00

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