Developing Search Strategies for Literature Databases

Preparing to search: Translating your research interest into a search query.

Before we search a database like PsycInfo or PubMed, it can be helpful to organize your thoughts.

1. What research topic do you want to learn more about for your thesis work, or what is a question you have relating to your topic?
   - What concepts are essential components of your research topic? These could be constructs, experimental methods, cell types, interventions, populations, settings, etc.
   - Are there different ways to describe those concepts?
   - How are those concepts related?

2. List your key concepts.

   I'm looking for articles that are about

   concept #1

   AND

   concept #2

   AND

   concept #3

3. Think about different ways those concepts could be described in a scholarly article. You don't need to generate all relevant terms for each concept at this stage.

Concept #1: could be described as term #1a, term #1b, term #1c

Concept #2 could be described as term #2a, term #2b, term #2c

Concept #3 could be represented by term #3a, term #3b, term #c.

4. Structure your question the way you want to conduct your initial search. Don't worry about using quotation marks or other search features, but do try using ANDs and ORs to structure your search.

term #1a OR term #1b OR term #1c

AND

term #2a OR term #2b OR term #2c

AND

term #3a OR term #3b OR term #c

PsycInfo Search Examples

Is **sleep quality** a mediator of the positive effect of **being in nature** on **psychological well-being**?

Concept #1: Sleep quality - # of hours of sleep, interrupted vs uninterrupted sleep, daytime sleepiness

Concept #2: Contact with nature - wilderness, hiking, being outdoors, playing outside

Concept #3: Psychological well-being - good mental health, life satisfaction, feeling positive

Search #1

"Sleep quality" OR "sleep duration" OR "uninterrupted sleep"

AND

Nature OR wilderness OR outdoor*

AND

"Well-being" OR wellbeing

Search #2

(Sleep N3 (quality OR duration OR uninterrupted OR interrupted)) OR sleepiness OR wakefulness OR insomnia OR DE "Sleep Quality" OR DE "Sleep Onset"

AND

Nature OR wilderness OR hiking OR "forest bathing" OR outdoor* OR DE "Nature-Based Interventions" OR DE "Wilderness Experience"

AND

"Well being" OR wellbeing OR "Life Satisfaction"

<u>Consider applying filters</u>.

Source Type: Journal articles, dissertations, books

Age: Young adulthood (18-29), Childhood (birth - 12 years)

Methodology: Empirical study, Literature review

PubMed Search Example

("Sleep Hygiene"[Mesh] OR "Sleep quality" OR "sleep duration" OR "uninterrupted sleep")

AND

("Wilderness"[Mesh] OR "Forests"[Mesh] OR Nature OR outdoor* OR "forest bathing")

AND

("Psychological Well-Being"[Mesh] OR "Personal Satisfaction"[Mesh] OR "Well being" OR wellbeing)

Beyond keyword searching

Subject headings:
- Standardized terms to describe concepts important to a discipline or a database.
- "Subjects" / APA Thesaurus terms in PsycInfo. MeSH / Medical subject headings in PubMed.
- Used to "tag" articles to tell us what they're about.
- Can describe populations (residents of a particular country, caregivers, elderly people, racial identity), interventions (cognitive behavioral therapy, MRI, surgery, drugs), experimental methods (animal models, qualitative and quantitative methods of gathering data), anatomy & physiology (hippocampus, itching), diseases & conditions (alcohol use disorder, osteoporosis, quality of life), etc.

Author Name Searches - different approaches
- Click on an author's name in a reference in a database like PsycInfo or PubMed.
- Tell the database to search in the Author Name field. Using Advanced Search, change "All Fields" to "Author Name"
- Look up the author's name in Google Scholar. See if they have a Google Scholar profile.
- Google the author's name. See if they have a lab website or other profile that lists their publications.

Citation Tracking - forward and backward
- In **PubMed**, scroll down past the abstract to see "Similar Articles," other PubMed articles that have **cited** the one you're looking at, and (sometimes) the references in the bibliography of the one you're looking at.
- In **Google Scholar**, click on the "cited by" link under the citation to see publications that have cited the one you're looking at (as computed by Google Scholar).
- The bibliographies of **review articles** are also good places to look for related articles.

Please email me or make an appointment if you'd like any assistance or have questions!
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