Introduction to Searching

It is expected that you will use the journal literature as part of your studies, to support statements in assignments and as a source of best evidence. Equally, while on placement/clinical practice, articles from the journals will provide evidence to support the implementation of guidelines and clinical decision making. It is therefore critical to your pre- and post-qualification success that you engage with the databases, such as CINAHL, which index the journal literature.

CINAHL indexes articles from over 5,000 Nursing and Allied Health journal titles. Unlike most databases and web search engines, it assigns subject index terms (CINAHL Subject Headings) to each article which can be used to overcome problems with terminology. This is supported by a thesaurus which matches your search terms to the Subject Headings.

CINAHL SUBJECT HEADINGS

The index terminology is based on a care model of health and therefore reflects the language used by Nurses, Midwives and the Allied Health Professions. CINAHL Subject Headings use American definitions, practice and spelling but are supported by the thesaurus that translates UK terminology and spelling. For example:

Articles using any of the following terms: Bedsore, Pressure Sore or Decubitus Ulcer will be indexed using the term Pressure Ulcer. When searching for Pressure Sore the thesaurus will recognise the term and direct you to using Pressure Ulcer.

The advantage of this form of searching is it reduces the need to think of every variation of term, drug name, etc. when starting a search to make sure you find all of the relevant information.

Boolean Searching

Boolean Operators are AND and OR. In a search these give the ability to connect Subject Headings demonstrating the relationships between them and helping to refine a search.

**AND** = First term and second term have to appear in the same paper. AND helps to provide a focus.

**OR** = Either the first term or the second term have to appear in the papers. OR is used to combine searches for synonyms or concepts where it is not important which term appears as long as one of them is in a paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vitamin D</th>
<th>AND</th>
<th>Bone Loss</th>
<th>To find Vitamin D and Bone Loss mentioned in the same papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin D₂</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Vitamin D₃</td>
<td>To search for either Vitamin D₂ or D₃ where you do not mind which term appears, as long as one of them is present.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In CINAHL, use Boolean Operators when you have a result for each of your search terms (see Structuring a search in CINAHL below).
Structuring a search in CINAHL

Do not enter sentences or multiple terms in the search box.
Only use the top search box when searching.

The best way to search CINAHL is to enter a single term, search, and then go back and enter a second term and search again. Then combine the terms using AND or OR. A method for structuring the sequence in which search terms are entered is to use the following:

1. Terms which describe the Patient and/or Problem.
2. Terms which describe the Intervention or Interest Focus

In practice the above sequence would look like:

S1 Pressure Ulcer (Problem)
S2 Beds and Mattresses (Intervention)
S3 S1 AND S2 (Problem and Intervention)

The advantage of this approach is that “Pressure Ulcer” as the problem of interest will not change, but the intervention or interest focus might. For example: If you also needed information on Pressure Ulcer assessment, only the term Clinical Assessment Tools would need to be added to the search, saving the need to start again.

S1 Pressure Ulcer
S2 Beds and Mattresses
S3 S1 AND S2
S4 Clinical Assessment Tools
S5 S1 AND S4

(The S before the numbers CINAHL uses as an abbreviation for Search.)

Editing a search

CINAHL offers several options to refine a search result. To the right of a search result is a link “Edit”. Clicking on this will open a new window with multiple options. Do not click more than two at a time. Try two and if there are still high numbers of search results click on Edit again and try one or two more. The risk in using too many of the options in one go is that you over focus the search and miss relevant material.

The options which might be considered as most useful to begin with are (in no particular order):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Sub-option</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Subset</td>
<td>UK and Ireland</td>
<td>This will edit the search to Journal Titles published in the UK or Ireland. Article content and authors may not be about or from the UK and Ireland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Article</td>
<td>Primary and Secondary Research only.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only use when there is a specific age group as the focus of your search.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How old is too old?
The results of a search are displayed firstly by relevance and then by date. Do not use the Edit option “Published Date”.

The answer to “How old is too old?” is:

1. Has the information in the article been supplanted by recent changes? For example: An article referring to the Code of Conduct dated 2007 will be out of date as the Code was amended in 2008.
2. Always evaluate anything you read. A good quality research paper published in 2003 should be preferred to a poor quality paper published yesterday to support clinical decision making. In an assignment highlighting the relative strengths and weaknesses of research will form part of your critical analysis.