10 Tips for Smarter Searching: Part 2
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Part 1 of this post focused on some basic search techniques to help you streamline your database searching. In Part 2, we’ll explain techniques to narrow your results and give you some free tools and resources you might not be aware of.

Note: This post is adapted from the 2014 Combined Sections Meeting session, "Ask-A-Librarian: Better Searching in 2 Hours or Less," presented by Gini Blodgett, MSLS, lead information resources specialist in the Evidence-Based Resources Department at APTA.

#6: Field Searching, or Advanced Searching, Helps You Retrieve More Precise Results
When you enter search terms, most databases automatically use keyword searching: That is, they find matches for your terms in any field (eg, title, author, source, author affiliation, full article text, etc) of an article’s record. The end result is that you typically retrieve more information, but with less precision.

To search more efficiently, try field searching: Search for authors using the author field, unique words in a title, or the entire title. This leads us to...

#7: Find Out If the Database You Are Using Has a "Subject Search" Option
Not sure which words to use in a search? For some topics, subject searching (ie, using terms from a predefined list) works better than keyword or freestyle searching. Subject searching may produce fewer results, but you will search with more precision. How do you find these subject lists?

- In PubMed, click on MeSH (Medical Subject Headings).
- In CINAHL Complete (Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature) click on CINAHL Headings in the blue ribbon at the top of the screen.
- In SPORTDiscus, click on Thesaurus in the blue ribbon at the top of the screen.

Another way to discover subject headings—also called descriptors or major concepts—is to check the terms assigned to articles obtained from a keyword search. Usually, the subject headings will appear either above or below the article text.

#8. Don’t Limit Yourself to Your First Set of Results;—Revise Your Terms and Database Selections
The same search phrase entered in 2 different databases may pull up very different results. If your topic encompasses more than 1 major subject area—such as exercise and nutrition—try searching both a sports medicine database like SPORTDiscus and a health database like CINAHL Complete.

Too many articles in your results? Be more precise in your search terms: Use "muscle stretching" OR "resistance training" instead of the broader term "exercise".

Too few results? Expand the scope of your search terms: Use the broader concept of "upper extremity" instead of "shoulder".

Keep reworking your search string until your results get you the research you want. (For more details on this, see Part 1.)
#9. Include Indexes and Extracting Services in Your Searches
Even though they don't always offer full-text access, indexes and abstracting services like Cochrane Controlled Trials Register can be a comprehensive source for your topic. At the minimum, you'll be able to pull up the citation and abstract. (See LHL’s Physical Therapy guide for instructions on looking up full text without the UAB Article Linker button.)

In PTNow ArticleSearch, the indexes and extracting services are CINAHL Complete (some full text), Cochrane Controlled Trials Register (CENTRAL), Cochrane Methodology Register, Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects, Health Technology Assessments, and NHS Economic Evaluation Database.

Other extracting services for physical therapy literature are: The George Institute for Global Health's Physiotherapy Evidence Database (PEDro) and APTA's Hooked on Evidence, which contains extracts for selected intervention articles. Both provide defined research data from each article reviewed, but not the entire content of the article reviewed. (Note: Hooked on Evidence is phasing out and no longer accepts new extracts, but it will remain accessible as a legacy database.)

#10. Take Advantage of Any Special Features the Databases Offer
Most literature databases offer time-saving features to help you keep current on research important to you:

- Searching inside one periodical or across all periodicals in the database
- A personal folder for saving search results, alerts, and more (requires a free account creation and log-in)
- Alerts and RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds to track new research on your favorite topic or publications by a selected researcher, table of contents, etc
- Style guide selection (AMA, APA, Chicago, etc) for outputting your citations
- Functions for importing citations into your own bibliographic software, such as EndNote, RefWorks, or ProCite

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