CINAHL Complete

DOING AN ADVANCED SEARCH WITH CINAHL SUBJECT HEADINGS

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Doing an advanced search in CINAHL

Using subject headings and abstract/article title searching to improve your results

Before you start searching

The Plan

Before you start searching you will need to plan out what terms you’re going to look for. Initially they will come from your research topic/assignment title but you should also try to think of whether there is any other way of expressing a concept using a different word or phrase.

For example, if you were doing a search on handwashing you should also look for “hand washing” as two words, hand hygiene, hand sanitation, hand disinfection and so on. It is possible that there is only one way to express a particular concept, but most of the time there are multiple terms or phrases that may have been used by different authors when writing their articles so you will need to think of—and search for—as many of those terms as possible in order to reduce the risk of missing out on articles that may be relevant to your research topic.

Subject Heading Searches

Some databases—like CINAHL—don’t just allow you to search for your keywords or phrases in the abstract or title of an article, they’ll also let you browse through a database specific list of subject terms that are tailored to the needs of the disciplines covered by that database.

It is important to be aware that you cannot just search in the subject headings index as, on its own, it is too limiting and you will miss relevant articles. However, if you do a subject heading search and then follow that up with an abstract/article title search then you will get a decent breadth of coverage of the material that matches your search terms.

Not all databases have one of these searchable indexes but CINAHL is one that does.

It is also important to note that, although the content of the database is international, the company that produces the database is US in origin and for that
reason the subject headings are derived from the US National Library of Medicine’s subjects. This means that there may be some terminology differences that you will have to take into account when searching.

For example, if you were looking for articles referring to **carers**, this is the term that is generally used in the UK to describe this particular client group. But, if you were also doing a subject heading search in the thesaurus of the database, you would have to look for **caregivers** because that’s the CINAHL heading used to describe that group of people.

It may seem a bit over the top but the more you use the database(s) that have these specific thesauri that you can search/browse, the more familiar you’ll become with which terms are shared internationally and which terms may be slightly (or very) different depending on the country the research is coming from/where the database originates.

Process
You can map out your search strategy in whichever way works best for you but you should note down all of the terms that you’re going to look for, grouping them together by concept.

What this means is that if, for example, you were going to do a search for articles looking at:

> 'Qualitative research into barriers to good hand hygiene practice among health care professionals'

you would list all of the variant terms you could search for that were related to each individual concept, bearing in mind any unique search options the database you’re using may have.¹

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¹ Some databases won’t require you to search for age groups narratively i.e. searching for ‘older people’ / aged / elderly etc. but will provide you with a selection of age ranges that you can choose from by ticking the relevant box in a sidebar or ‘Search Options’ section instead.
You can do this in list form, using a grid box, or if you are a more visual learner and spider diagrams or mind mapping diagrams/ trees work best for you, you can use one of those.

The example below uses the grid box method and each column contains the search terms for one search.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH ONE</th>
<th>SEARCH TWO</th>
<th>SEARCH THREE</th>
<th>SEARCH FOUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Hand hygiene</td>
<td>Health professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Obstacles</td>
<td>Hand Washing</td>
<td>Nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Non-compliance</td>
<td>Handwashing</td>
<td>Doctors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>Hand sanitation</td>
<td>Medics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-adherence</td>
<td>Hand disinfection</td>
<td>Occupational therapists</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adherence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Radiographers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: Concept table*

It is not good practice to look for all of your search terms, for all of your different concepts, in one go as you run the risk of confusing the database as to how you want your search to be done; it’s also more complicated to look in multiple locations (subject, abstract, title) for your terms, and you may find that you waste a lot of time correcting and re-doing your search.

Looking for each concept as a completely separate search and then combining them together to see what articles they have in common is much better practice, and also gives you the opportunity to do lots of different combinations if your first search isn’t very successful.

All of the search terms in the grid box above will be looked for in the abstract and article title. When it comes to looking for them in the subject heading index however, you may not be able to look for them all as some of them may not be ‘official’ subject headings for that database and on the next few pages there will be
a run-through of looking for the concepts that are set out in the grid box and how and what and where to look for those terms in CINAHL.

To access CINAHL

- Log in to UDo
- Click on the tile for **Library** on your UDo home page
- From the list, click on the tile to go to our Library Guides
- In the left-hand menu on the next page (in the box with the header **Quick Links**) click on the link for **Indexes & Databases**
- On the next page you will see the full list of all databases we have access to, and also the alphabet spread over a single line. Click on the letter **C**
- On the next page, scroll down until you can see the link for **CINAHL Complete** and click on that

**NB:** CINAHL Complete is an EBSCOhost database (like Library Plus/ Medline/ PsycINFO/ AMED etc.) which means that if you created a personal account for Library Plus then the same username and password will work on any other EBSCOhost database. If you haven’t created a personal account for one of these databases then you should do that now.

Create a personal account

Having a personal account is a good idea as it means you’ll be able to add articles/ records you want to keep to a folder and they won’t then be deleted when you exit the database.

In the banner at the top of the screen click on the link **Sign In**

*Figure 2: Sign in link for EBSCO databases*
You will be presented with a username/password box – your UDo login won’t work here so click on the link to Create a New Account and follow the instructions on screen.

Once your account has been created click on the Folder link in the banner at the top of the screen.

This will take you to your in-database file storage area. You have two sections to the sidebar on the left: a generic section at the top which everyone gets and cannot change; and a custom section at the bottom which is empty apart from a button that will allow you to create folders.

In the My Custom section, click on New and create a folder that you’ve called Articles (or Yes or Maybe)

When you’ve done this, click on the small Back link next to the blue, University of Derby square towards the top left of the page.
This should return you to the advanced search screen and we’re ready to start searching.

The Search
1: Looking for subject headings
In CINAHL, go to the blue banner at the top of the screen and click on the tab that says CINAHL Subject Headings

![Figure 5: CINAHL Subject Headings tab](image)

On the next screen you will be presented with a single search box which you can use to browse for terms to see whether they are official subject headings that you can search for.

So, from our example, I would type in handwashing to see if that’s the subject heading used by the database to categorise articles on that topic.

![Figure 6: CINAHL's Subject Headings search screen](image)

CINAHL will default to looking for you terms in order of relevancy but you can change it so that it looks for any subject heading that begins with or contains the term(s) you typed in. To search for your term(s), click on the **Browse** button.
If your term(s) are official subject headings within the database then you should get some results on the next page and hopefully the term(s) you typed in will be at the top of the list.

![Figure 7: CINAHL’s Subject Headings results page](image)

The term the database found, and thinks may be most relevant/ the closest match, is at the top of the list with a box to the left to select it.

This particular term has a tick box in the **Explode (+)** column and also in the **Major Concept** column. !! You will not always have a box that you can tick in the Explode (+) column as it indicates whether there are narrower terms—related to the one it found—that you can also search for. If you click on the link for the subject term the narrower subject headings will be displayed for you to select from.

The **Major Concept** box allows you to specify you only want to see results where e.g. *Handwashing* is the main focus of the article’s content.

The **Scope** note callout icon will give you the CINAHL definition of the term so that you can check that your understanding matches and, in some cases, highlight key differences in terminology between different countries.
Explode:

Figure 8: Exploding a CINAHL Subject Heading search

Clicking on Search will return you to the Advanced Search screen in CINAHL and you will see that the database has not only given you a set of results where any of your terms have been added to the article record as a subject heading but it has also left the terms of your search in the first search box at the top of the screen.
You can see that the database hasn’t just put your search terms into the box; it’s added a few elements which are shortcuts that tell it where and what to search for. So, the MH tells it that it’s doing an Exact Subject Heading search and the + symbol after the term tells the database to include any narrower terms nested underneath the term so in this case it will search for handwashing or surgical scrubbing in the subject headings area of each article record.

Because it’s searching using or it will give you results if it finds handwashing on its own, surgical scrubbing on its own, or if it finds both sets of terms on the same record together.

2: Adding in the abstract/ title searches for the same concept
Having looked for the subject heading related to handwashing but now we also need to know if any of the other terms we thought were related to this topic are present in either the abstract or title of any of the articles.

You would do this type of search as well as the subject search because on its own the subject search is too narrow and you will miss things. Always do a CINAHL heading search and look for terms in the abstract / title. Don’t do a heading search on its own.

The terms you’d look for are the ones set out in the grid box on page 2 and what can make the search a bit easier is to type out related terms in a ‘string’ (basically set them out in a straight line like a piece of string) and then it makes it easier to copy and paste them into the search boxes of different databases.
Example

Search One
Handwashing OR “hand washing” OR “hand hygiene” OR “surgical scrubbing” OR “hand sanitation” OR “hand disinfection”

And we can do the same for our other sets of terms ready for when we look for those concepts...

Search Two
Barriers OR obstacles OR non-compliance OR non-adherence OR compliance OR adherence

Search Three
Qualitative OR interview* OR questionnaire OR “focus groups”

Search Four
“Health professionals” OR nurs* OR doctors OR medics OR “occupational therapists” OR radiographers

Copy all of the related terms in search string one and paste them into the second and third search boxes on the advanced search screen in CINAHL

To the left of each of those boxes make sure you change the default AND by clicking on the down arrow and selecting OR

To the right of the middle box, where it says Select a field (optional), click on the down arrow and choose Abstract from the drop-down list. Do the same on the bottom box but select Title from the drop-down list instead. Your search screen should look like the image overleaf:

They are related because they are terms you would be happy to see any of in your results i.e. if handwashing wasn’t in an article but hand washing was, that would be okay.
Figure 10: Multipart concept search - subject headings, abstract, & article title

NB: You don’t have to do anything with the ‘Select a Field (optional)’ box next to the top row because the MH prefix already tells the database where to look for your terms.

When you click on the Search button you will then be shown results comprised of any record that contains either the subject headings you chose, OR your key terms in the abstract, OR your key terms in the article title.

Next Steps...
Repeat the above process (as many times as necessary) for your remaining concepts, starting with the subject heading search first before adding in your terms in for the abstract and title searches.

NB: Sometimes, when you search for a term that isn’t in the list, the database will direct you to the word or phrase you should use.

Figure 11: Redirect in Subject Headings search
When you have done all of your searches (in the case of the above example it would be five separate concepts), click on the **Clear** link which is below the green **Search** button at the top of the page. This removes the last set of search terms from the advanced search box which is necessary before you start to combine your different searches together.

Then, click on the **Search History** link which you will find underneath the search boxes.

Because of the way the database works, we should have two searches listed in our search history for each concept.

Search one (S1) is the subject heading search and search two (S2) is the combination of subject heading, abstract, and article title search.

This means that when you’re combining different searches together you will only need to select the **even** numbered searches. i.e. S2, S4, S6, and S8.

Once you’ve selected the relevant search ID numbers (Search ID#) you’ll need to click on the grey **Search with AND** button to narrow your results.
Figure 13: Complete search history with results
When you click on ‘Search with AND’ you will be shown the articles that showed up in every single search you did.

![Image of search interface]

*Figure 14: Combining all relevant searches together*

The database uses the search ID number as shorthand for the terms you asked it to combine together.

You can see that, despite the very large number of results for each individual search that was done, when added together the results come down to a more manageable number.

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*Remember: this won’t always happen. Sometimes you’ll reach this point and you’ll still have a few thousand results—it will depend on the topic you’re researching and how popular it is.*

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**Saving your search**

This is the best point in the search process to save what you’ve looked for and found.

To save, select any searches that you want to be saved – in most cases it would be everything so you would tick the box at the top of the search history for **Select / deselect all** and then click on the link **Save Searches / Alerts** (if you are not logged in to your EBSCO account you will be asked to log in at this point.)

![Image of search interface with Select / deselect all highlighted]

*Figure 15: Saving your search history, part one*

The next page will list the searches you’re saving and you’ll be able to give your search a title. **NB:** if you’re going to repeat your search in another EBSCO database
e.g. Medline, then it’s a good idea to put the name of the database in the title as well so that, if and when you retrieve and re-run your search, you retrieve your CINAHL search into CINAHL and not Medline by mistake. (Otherwise your search could break as it’s in the wrong database.)

Figure 16: Saving your search history, part 2

Click on Save and you will be taken to your personal folder where searches are saved by default.

You can move your search after it’s been saved e.g. to one of the folders you created in your custom area, but remember that when you click on the link to retrieve your saved search the database will take you to the default location and you will then have to navigate to the folder you moved the search to in order to re-run it.

On the next page is a screenshot of what you might see once you’ve clicked on Save:
Next Steps
Once you’ve saved your search, click on the small Back link which you’ll find in the top-left of the page; next to the blue square with the University logo on it:
**Limiting results using the sidebar**

By this point, you should have done a subject headings, abstract, and title search for each of your concepts / concept terms, and combined them together so that you have a set of results containing at least one of the terms from each of your searches.

Depending on the concept you’ve searched for you may have a few hundred results, you may have a few thousand results, but there are a few extra steps that you can take to reduce the number of results a little more.

The first section of the sidebar has the heading, **Limit To**, and below the two, blue vertical rectangles for the date range there is a small, **Show More**, link; if you click on it, it will open up a fuller range of limiting options. The next image is just the top half of the search options dialog box:

![Search Options](image)

*Figure 19: Limiting results*

Select your date range here; you don’t need a start / end month, just the years will do

Peer reviewed material has gone through additional review processes by experts in that field of study on top of being accepted by a journal editor / editorial board
**Language**
If you’re bi-lingual, or multi-lingual, then you can leave the language option until you see what your results are – otherwise, you can select English Language from here.

When you’ve made your selections, click on one of the Save buttons.

It’s not unusual to lose anywhere from 33% to 50% of your results by limiting to a 10 year date range, peer reviewed, and language. This will, however, vary so it’s not guaranteed to happen every time.

In this example, the results have dropped to 229, which is a manageable number to screen through.

**Other parts of the sidebar**
Back on your results page, you will see the next section is, ‘Source Types’, and for this search the only visible option is **Academic Journals** – you still need to tick to select this option. For some searches you may have anywhere up to six or more results to choose from.

**NB:** if you want to select more than one of the items listed, e.g. you want academic journals and CEUs (Continuing Education Units), you will need to click on the ‘Show More’ link (if present) at the bottom of that section so that you can choose multiple options and update when you’re done. Otherwise, if you click to select an item directly in the sidebar, the database will immediately update your results with your selection and won’t let you choose additional options.

**Caveats**
It’s up to you whether you select e.g. Subject: Major Heading, Age, Gender, or Geography from the sidebar but, one of the things to consider before doing so is that, not every record in your results list is guaranteed to have a ‘subjects’ field assigned to it. And all of the options listed above are in the ‘subjects’ field.

What this can mean is that once you start to select from one, or all, of those options in the sidebar, any record in your results list that doesn’t have a ‘subjects’ field (which includes age, gender, and geography), will be removed from your list without you knowing that article was there.
So, unless you’re extremely confident that all of the key articles useful to you will definitely have a ‘subjects’ field, it’s better to narrow results down through screening.

**Screening your results**
Screening is where you read the article title and abstract to determine whether it’s worth investing your time to read the article in full.

Depending on the number of results you have you can either screen your results all in one go (this method is fine if you only have a few hundred results or less); or you can separate the screening process into two parts.

This is where having the personal account for the database comes into its own.

**Part One**
If you’ve already created folders for Yes / Maybe, the next step is to look at the brief view of the articles i.e. the titles and any visible subject headings and ask:

```
“Do I think this is going to be useful to my research?

Yes I do; or, no I don’t; or maybe, but I need more information before I can say either way.”
```

If it’s a NO, ignore it and move on to the next item.

If it’s a YES or a MAYBE, click on the blue folder to the far right of the article title and, as long as you’ve created at least one folder in your custom area, you should see a list to choose from to store your article.

Figure 20: Saving article records
Click on the link for the folder you want the item to go into; the folder will then change to yellow to act as a quick, visual cue to you that you’ve seen this article and stored it somewhere.

*Figure 21: Confirmation article record is saved*

Keep going until all of your results are either in one of your folders or you’ve rejected them because you were able to determine they weren’t relevant by looking at the article title.

**Part Two**

Screening your ‘maybe’ articles to determine whether any of them fall into the yes / no category.

You should now have two folders with items in them in your custom area.

Click on the Folder tab in the blue banner at the top of the screen and go to your custom area. Ignore the Yes folder for now—you’ve already decided that they’re going to be useful—what you need to decide is whether the contents of the Maybe folder are going to become a Yes or a No.

Click on the Maybe folder and then, when you get the drop-down list, click on the articles link. The brief view of the articles should be displayed on the right of the page.

For each article, click on the title to view the detailed record and then read: the abstract, any database supplied subject headings, any author supplied keywords – that should be enough information to allow you to either say, ‘Yes, it looks useful’, or ‘No, it doesn’t’.

Unfortunately, when you’re looking at the detailed record, you won’t be able to move/ delete from that page so you will need to go back one level by clicking on the **Folder List** link at the top of your record.

*Figure 22: Returning from record view to list of saved articles*
Once you’ve gone back a level there should be a tick box to the left of the article title; select that and then go to the top of the page (if you just press the HOME key on your keyboard it should return you to the top of the page in one go)

If you want to put it into your Yes folder, click on the grey Move To button and then select the folder you want it to go into. If you’ve decided it’s a No you can just click on the grey Delete button.

Following this process, you should eventually be left with a completely empty ‘Maybe’ folder and have moved article records that you think will be useful to your research into your Yes folder.

Some of those records may already have a link to the full-text of the article that you can click on; some of them you may be able to access in print from other university libraries; some of them you may have to request as an inter-library loan\(^2\) and there may be a small charge for this depending on your level of study.

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\(^2\) Inter-library loans are where we ask the British Library (or another institution’s library) to supply you with a copy of your requested article. More information can be found on the inter-library loan web page: https://www.derby.ac.uk/services/library/using-the-library/inter-library-loans/
As you read your selected articles, making notes and identifying themes, you may decide that what you originally thought was a ‘yes’ has actually become a ‘no’ and that’s fine, it happens naturally as part of the research process.

Further help
This guide has been designed to provide guidance on completing an advanced search in CINAHL if you have never done an advanced search in this much detail before, or to act as a refresher if you’ve recently had a group session or individual appointment on searching CINAHL for articles on your topic(s) of research.

If you have any questions, or if your search does not seem to be working effectively, please contact your Subject Librarian for help and advice.

You can book an appointment with them using the online form here: https://libcal.derby.ac.uk/appointments/ (please remember to select the right person/ option once you’ve selected the site you want the appointment to take place at).

You can also find their contact details on their subject guides. Go here: https://libguides.derby.ac.uk/ for a list of areas and subject guides available.

Help us improve this guide!
Was there anything about this guide that was particularly confusing?
Were there any steps missing in the instructions?
Were there any figures missing from the instructions that would have improved your understanding of, and engagement with, the process of searching?

If you would like to give anonymous feedback on the usefulness of / issues with the guide, please fill out this form: https://tinyurl.com/y8agxs3x