Search MEDLINE, CINAHL, and HealthSource Using Keywords

Content:
This handout demonstrates how to conduct a keyword search using the databases MEDLINE, CINAHL, and HealthSource Nursing/Academic Edition.

While MEDLINE is highlighted as the example database for these instructions, all three databases have similar functionality regarding their search features.

**Identifying Your Problem Statement:**

To start your search, first identify the problem statement for your topic. For instance, if you are interested in researching the childhood obesity, it is not enough to simply say, “Obesity is a significant challenge facing today’s youth.” You need to be more specific when identifying your problem. Instead of the vague sentence above, your problem statement might look like this:

**Obesity resulting from a lack of availability to healthy foods is one of the most significant health challenges currently facing American children.**

**Identifying Your Keywords:**

Next, identify the keywords in your problem statement. For the above problem statement, here is a list of possible keywords:

- obesity OR obese OR fat OR overweight
- child OR children OR childhood OR kid OR youth OR juvenile
- nutrition OR nutritious OR health OR healthy OR healthful OR wholesome
- food OR diet OR dietary
- available OR availability OR access OR accessible OR accessibility
- America OR American OR “United States”
**Advanced Searching Using Your Keywords:**

Then, enter a database such as MEDLINE, CINAHL, or HealthSource Nursing/Academic Edition.

Once there, select **Advanced Search**, enter your keywords in the blanks provided, and select AND or OR in the radial bubbles next to the blanks to combine your keywords. Upon completion of this task, your screen should look like this:

```
Searching: MEDLINE with Full Text | Choose Databases

obes* OR fat OR overweight Select a Field (optional)
AND  child* OR kid OR youth OR juven
AND  nutritio* OR health* OR wholesorr
AND  food OR diet*
AND  availab* OR access*
AND  America? OR "United States"

Search  Clear
```

Notice the * symbol. When searching **child***, this tells the database to search any form of the word (i.e. **child, children, childhood**).

The ? symbol allows for searching a word with one interchangeable letter. For instance, entering **m?n** tells the database to search for **man** or **men**. Further, entering a ? at the end of a word such as **health?** tells the database to search for **health** and **healthy**, but not healthful (you would need and * at the end of the word for that one).

Also, **quotation marks around two or more words** allow you to **search for multiple words together as a phrase** (i.e. “**United States**”).

**Below the Advance Search** box, you will find a **Limit your results** box which is useful for setting limits regarding certain criteria you desire for your articles (i.e. specific date, language, type of article, etc.). For instance, setting limits might be useful if you need a review article about your topic that was published in the last five years.

**A Note About Literature Reviews:**

The concept of a literature review is intended to promote understanding through analysis of works published on the topic. The “literature review” is a section of your proposal that offers a formalized way to communicate to your readers what extant findings are in the field, as well as defining what knowledge you hope to build on.

For example, to begin work on the subject of childhood obesity in America, one would first research and examine articles already written and research already done to gather historic perspective on the topic as well as become acquainted with related and modern prevailing attitudes, concepts, and research.