Searching in the online databases can be a confusing and challenging task. If you find that your searches tend to produce either too many results to be useful or no results at all, you’re not alone. I’ll be presenting you with helpful ways to narrow your search results and find results relevant to your research question.
Searching Topics

- Extracting search terms from a research question
  - Subject Headings
  - Keywords
  - Subheadings
  - Boolean Operators
  - Filters
- General Searching Tips
Terms from a Question

- Entering a whole question into a database doesn’t work
- Use 2-3 words rather than a whole or partial sentence

How do I prevent medication errors in the hospital?

medication errors  hospital
Once you’ve determined which specific words you would like to use to conduct your search, you’re ready to enter them into the database.

But wait! Some databases, like CINAHL, have something called subject headings. When you search using your chosen words, the database will give you a list of other terms to choose from. In CINAHL, this is the default.

What are these subject headings? Should you use them? How are these different from just searching with the words you chose earlier?
Subject Headings

- Subject Headings act as a thesaurus for the database—it’s how the articles are indexed.

- Helps clear up any issue with synonyms, making sure you find articles related to a concept, not just a term.

- Search the database using terms it is programmed to understand.
Keywords

• Keyword search will look for your word *everywhere*

• Only the entered term is searched; synonyms are excluded
Subheadings

- Subheadings act as a facet of subject headings
- Narrow a broad subject heading to get more specific results
Boolean Operators

• **NOT** excludes a term from the search

• **AND** searches both terms *simultaneously*

• **OR** searches both terms *separately*
AND vs. OR

AND

hospitals

medication errors

OR
Filters

- Filters help narrow a search after the fact
- Some filter options include:
  - Year published
  - Language
  - Age
  - Gender
  - and more!!
General Searching Tips

• Start with a broad search, then narrow it as needed
  • This ensures that you don’t miss potentially relevant results

• Search each term separately, then combine them later
  • This allows you to alter your strategy if your initial search doesn’t work
More General Tips

• Don’t be afraid to hunt for the subject heading you need
  • Try looking for it under a different name/synonym

• Have fun!
  • The more you search, the easier it will be!