

Finding Evidence-based Research

Before you search the research databases you should develop a research question(s) based on the following four components:

Patient or client characteristics/population/problem
Intervention/test being considered
Comparison intervention/alternative (if any)
Outcome of clinical interest/measure/accomplishment

These four components often are referred to by the acronym PICO. Other evidence-based acronyms that you'll see in the literature are POEM (Patient Oriented Evidence that Matters) and Client Oriented Practical Evidence Search (COPES).

When you look at the abstract of a research article it should contain the following types of information:

Purpose or Objective: The purpose of this paper is to...

Research design or methodology: Data were gathered through structured interviews...

Findings or Results: The results provide insights into...

Research conclusions or implications: Data suggest that patients might be more motivated to...

Searching the databases for evidence-based literature

Keep in mind that the search tips below are meant to increase your likelihood of retrieving research or evidence-based articles, but it's not perfect. You should always read the abstract and sometimes the article before deciding if it is truly evidence-based.

CINAHL via EBSCOhost

CINAHL is a database that covers both nursing as well as allied health. The most effective way to look for evidence-based articles is to limit your search by using the Refine Search tab and selecting the box next to **Research Article**. This will look for articles that are clinical trials, meta-analyses, systematic reviews as well as qualitative research studies.

PubMed (Medline)

USF encourages the use of the free version of *Medline* known as *PubMed*. PubMed can be confusing to use for novice literature searchers.

General search tips:

- Capitalize Boolean operators like **AND**, **OR** or **NOT** or your search will not be executed properly!!
- Search phrases in "quotes" or PubMed will not search the words as a phrase.
- The **Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)** are very powerful search tools. The link to them can be found on the left hand side of the PubMed search page.

Limit by Publication Type [PT]

To increase the probability of retrieving research/evidence-based articles in *PubMed* use the **Publication Type [PT]** limits. The following limits can be selected under the **Limits** tab in *PubMed*:

- Clinical Trials [includes all types and phases of clinical trials]
- Clinical Trial, Phase I
- Clinical Trial, Phase II
- Clinical Trial, Phase III
- Clinical Trial, Phase IV
- Controlled Clinical Trial
- Multicenter Study
- Randomized Controlled Trial
- Meta-Analysis (will also pick up Systematic Reviews)

You can also search all of the above types of articles by adding to the end of your search **AND clinical trial [pt]** ([pt] standing for publication type).

Add MESH terms

You may also want to use the following MeSH terms to increase your probability of retrieving evidence-based articles, e.g. *your topic* and ("**Nursing Research**"[MeSH] OR "**Research**"[MeSH] OR "**Epidemiologic Methods**"[MeSH]).

PsycInfo via EBSCOhost

PsycInfo has a number of different "methodology" types that will increase the probability of finding evidence-based article.

- Limit your search by using the **Refine Search** tab and select the following **Methodology** types: Empirical research, Followup study, Longitudinal study, Prospective study, Retrospective study, Field study Meta analysis, Qualitative study, Quantitative study, Treatment outcome/Clinical Trial.
- Alternatively you can add the following **PsycInfo Thesaurus** terms to the end of your search to increase the probability of finding research articles, e.g.: *your topic* and (**Explode "Experimentation"** or **Explode "Methodology"** or **Explode "Experimental Design"** or **Explode "Experimental Methods"** or **Explode "Statistical Analysis"** or **Explode "Evaluation"** or **Explode "Measurement"**).

ERIC via EBSCOHost

- Use the **Refine Search** tab in *ERIC* and select both the **Publication Types**: *Numerical/Quantitative Data* or *Reports-Research*. Note that when you use the Publication Type *Reports-Research* you will retrieve articles that are not only original research but also reports just talking about other people's research. You will need to read the abstract or possibly the article to make sure the article is really research-based.
- Alternatively you can add the following **ERIC Thesaurus terms** to the end of your search to increase the probability of finding research articles, e.g.: *your topic* and (**Explode "Research"** or **Explode "Data Analysis"** or **Explode "Research Methodology"** or **Explode "Measures (Individuals)"** or **Explode "Evaluation Methods"**).