

# Searching Databases using Ovid / 10-step guide

## 1. Introduction

Ovid is a specialist search tool that allows you to search databases such as Medline, EMBASE, PsycINFO, Maternity and Infant Care and Global Health.

## 2. Planning your search

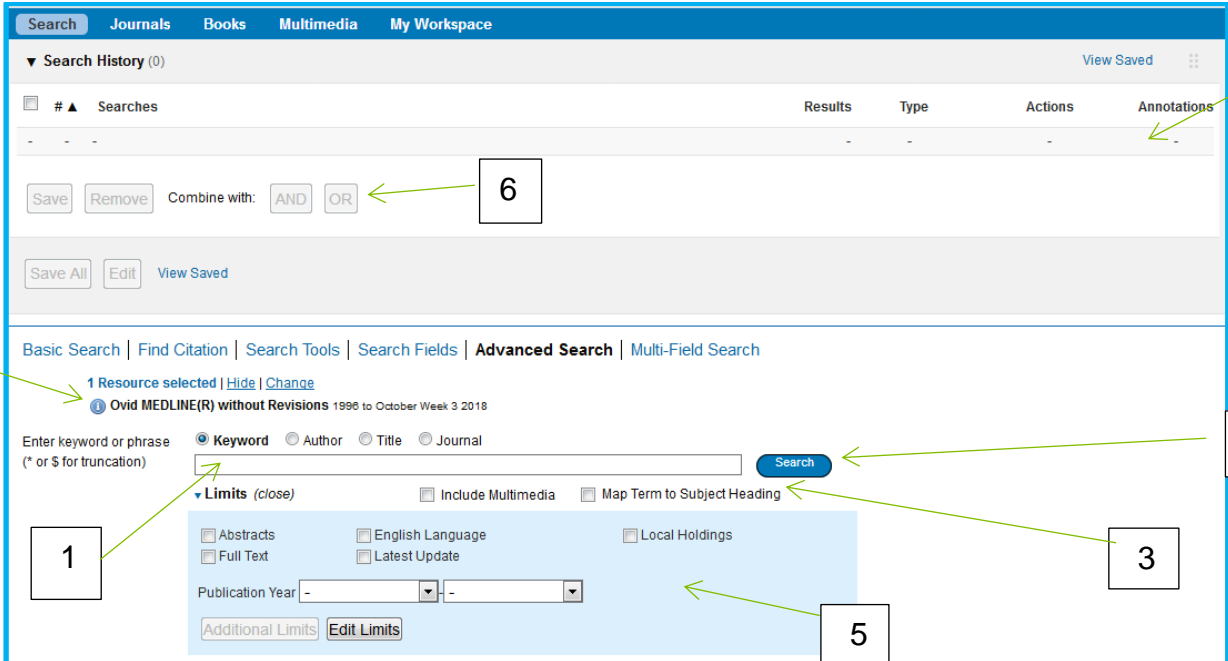
It can be helpful to think of your research topic as a question, or phrase it in a single sentence. You'll then need to break your question down into its main concepts and consider any alternative keywords/synonyms. You may want to consider broader or narrower terms, or variations in UK/US spellings.

## 3. Accessing a database

Go to <http://library.sgul.ac.uk> and click the 'Databases' button in the middle of the page. From the A-Z List, select the database you want to search e.g. Medline (Ovid). Note that some databases can be searched using different tools. If you are not using a library computer, make sure you use the off-site link and login with your SGUL username and password.

## 4. The search screen

Whichever database you access, the search screen in Ovid will look similar to the one below:



The screenshot shows the Ovid search interface with the following numbered callouts:

- 1**: Points to the search input field.
- 2**: Points to the Search button.
- 3**: Points to the Limits section.
- 4**: Points to the Search History table.
- 5**: Points to the Publication Year dropdown menu.
- 6**: Points to the Combine with (AND/OR) buttons.
- 7**: Points to the search navigation tabs (Basic Search, Find Citation, Search Tools, Search Fields, Advanced Search, Multi-Field Search).

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- 1 – **Search box** - enter your search terms here.
- 2 – **Search** – select this button to run a basic or keyword search.
- 3 – **Map Term to Subject Heading** – select this box before clicking 'Search' to run a search for subject headings.
- 4 – **Search History** – your searches will appear here, line by line.
- 5 – **Limits** - select this button to run a basic or keyword search.
- 6 – **Search Operators** – use these to combine your search lines.
- 7 – **Databases** – see which database you are searching; click 'change' to try another.

**N.B. the options in 3 and 5 vary between databases.**

## 5. Keyword searches

Ovid has been configured to search for keywords as a default. Enter your search terms, one by one – the results will appear in the search history above the search box. If you enter multiple words, Ovid will search for them as an exact phrase, so try to avoid typing whole sentences, or words such as 'in', 'of' etc.

When carrying out a keyword search, your search terms will need to cater for the differences between UK/US spellings, synonyms, different word endings and meanings. This is why it is useful to plan your search before you get started (see step 2). Some other helpful tips for keyword searching include:

### Truncation

Using the \* symbol in your keyword searches is useful for capturing plurals and other derivatives of a particular stem. For example, **mentor\*** will find articles containing the words mentor, mentors, mentorship and so on.

### Proximity searching

Using the ADJ operator between two keywords will find articles containing phrases where your keywords appear next to each other, in any order. You can make this more flexible by specifying a number. For example:

**cancer adj3 colon** will find articles where cancer and colon appear within 3 words of each other.

## 6. Subject Heading searches

Subject Headings are terms that are allocated to each article to describe its content. Searching via Subject Headings is an efficient way to search databases as they cater for the differences in spellings/words meanings etc. To see if there is a Subject Heading available for your terms, tick the '**Map term to subject heading**' box before you click the Search button:

Map Term to Subject Heading

The system will compare your search term to the subject headings that have been used to index the articles in that particular database:

Include All Subheadings

Combine with:

Select	Subject Heading	Explode	Focus	Scope
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Music Therapy</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	music therapy.mp. search as Keyword			

You might be offered an exact match in the next screen that is displayed – this will usually be ticked automatically. If there isn't an exact match, you may need to select one that is most appropriate. The 'Scope' note on the right-hand side of the page will provide you with more detail about how the subject heading is used.

Clicking 'Continue' once a term is ticked will offer you a choice of different subheadings:

Subheadings for: **Music Therapy**

Combine with:

Include All Subheadings (2357)

-- or choose one or more of these subheadings --

<input type="checkbox"/> /cl - Classification (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> /ma - Manpower (7)
<input type="checkbox"/> /ec - Economics (11)	<input type="checkbox"/> /mt - Methods (1002)
<input type="checkbox"/> /ed - Education (60)	<input type="checkbox"/> /og - Organization & Administration (52)

As a general rule, especially at the beginning of a search, you should include all subheadings to maximise the amount of results you retrieve. You can always narrow your search later.

Clicking 'Continue' will add your subject heading search to your search history.

## 7. Combining searches

Tick the boxes of the lines of the searches you wish to combine (e.g. 1 and 2) and then select AND or OR using the logic below, before clicking on **Combine**:

stress <b>OR</b> anxiety		Documents that discuss <b>either</b> stress <b>or</b> anxiety
stress <b>AND</b> anxiety		Documents that discuss <b>both</b> stress <b>and</b> anxiety

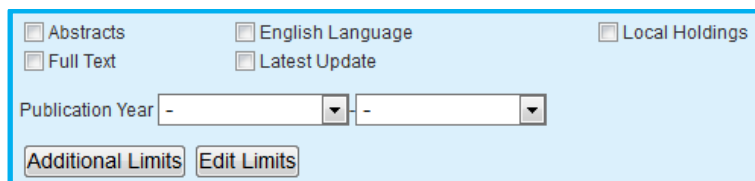
Remember, use OR to combine terms that are related to one another. This will broaden your search. Use AND to combine different concepts. This will narrow your search.

Your search might look something like this:

<input type="checkbox"/>	# ▲	Searches	Results	Type	Actions
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	dementia.mp.	69324	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	alzheimer*.mp.	96504	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	DEMENTIA/	30161	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	ALZHEIMER DISEASE/	64288	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	1 or 2 or 3 or 4	139102	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	6	Music Therapy/	2359	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	7	(music* adj3 therap*).mp.	2651	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	8	6 or 7	2651	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	9	5 and 8	324	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a>   <a href="#">More ▼</a>

## 8. Limiting your results

The limits function in Ovid can help narrow your search further and remove irrelevant articles. You may wish to restrict your results to a publication date range, view references written in English, or review only results available in full-text. Select these underneath the search box, click 'Search' and they will be applied to the last line of your search history:



Ideally you should apply limits at the end of your search. Applying them earlier may mean you miss out on relevant papers.

## 9. Reviewing your results

Searching is an iterative process and you might find you'll need to try different combinations of your search terms to improve the relevancy of your results. Try adding additional limits if you are retrieving too many results, or adding additional alternative terms if you are retrieving too few. If your results aren't quite relevant, check to see if any of your terms are throwing your search off track. You might also find that using Subject Headings will focus your search on papers that are about your topic, rather than those that just mention your keywords.

If you find useful articles, look at the keywords and subject headings used in the paper and build them into your search if you haven't already included them.

## 10. Saving and exporting your results

Your search results can be saved, emailed and exported, using the options just above your results list. Select the references you wish to save using the tick boxes to the left of the article title, or use the 'All' box to include all of your results.

The Print, Email and Export options will allow you to customise the amount of information you want to save/display. You can also opt to include a record of your search history, as well as any full-text links to articles if they are available via St George's Library.

Saving your search history will allow you to run it again at a later date, or you can save it as an alert to receive email updates when new papers are published on your topic. Simply select the 'Save all' button underneath your search history. You'll be prompted to login to your personal Ovid account – if you don't already have one you can create one at this stage.

You can run, edit or delete your searches and alerts by logging into Ovid, selecting 'My Workspace' and then clicking on 'My Searches & Alerts'

## Further help and support

For further advice on developing a search strategy, searching the healthcare databases using Ovid, or to book an appointment with your librarian, email us at [liaison@sgul.ac.uk](mailto:liaison@sgul.ac.uk).

You can also get face-to-face support at the Research Enquiries Desk between 11am-2pm Mon-Fri, or by booking on to one of our training sessions. See the Training pages of the Library website for more information.