AM Last Page: How to Perform an Effective Database Search

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1. Choose a database

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coverage</td>
<td>Biomedical literature, journal articles</td>
<td>Diverse disciplines, journal articles, book chapters, dissertations, abstracts</td>
<td>Education literature, journal articles, book chapters, Association of American Medical Colleges reports</td>
<td>Nursing and allied health literature, journal articles, book chapters, dissertations, audiovisuals</td>
<td>Scientific, technical, medical and social sciences literature, citation searching, journal articles, conference papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controlled vocabulary (See 2A)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Open</td>
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2. Select search terms

A. If available, use the database’s controlled vocabulary:
- A controlled vocabulary provides one term for a concept that may have different names.
- Controlled vocabularies help create exhaustive and unambiguous searches.
- MEDLINE’s controlled vocabulary is Medical Subject Headings (MeSH). For example, myocardial infarction is the MeSH for heart attack. Using the term myocardial infarction retrieves articles on both heart attack and myocardial infarction in MEDLINE.

B. Include synonyms and use truncation:
- Include synonyms and abbreviations to broaden your search and to help ensure comprehensiveness for ideas not yet identified in a standard thesaurus.
- Use truncation to search for alternate endings of search terms.

3. Use Boolean operators to combine search terms

- “OR” broadens the search
- “AND” narrows the search

4. Limit results

- Use limits to narrow the search.
- Apply limits one at a time to control search results.
- Popular limits include English language and date ranges.

5. Explain the search process in the methodology section of any report. Include the following:

- Search terms (indicate if controlled vocabulary was used)
- Boolean operators
- Databases searched
- Any limits applied
- Date of search

For additional information, consult your medical librarian.