DATABASE SEARCHING - some simple steps

1. Choose your keywords very carefully

For example:
- Think of synonyms (health, wellness)
- Be careful of differences in spelling (programme/program – tumour/tumor)
- Watch abbreviations (RAO / recurrent airway obstruction – Intensive care / ICU)
- Be aware of how the database uses controlled vocabulary (NB most databases have a thesaurus of the terms it uses - look at it to see how it indexes/describes your topic. MeSH are an example of this in Medline and CINAHL)
- Use quotation marks for key phrases (“domestic violence”)
- Consider how the concept is expressed in other countries (critical care / intensive care / primary care may all have subtly different meanings in different countries)

This is the most important part of your search. Using the wrong keywords can mean the difference between a successful search and one which finds nothing or misses key information.

2. Use Boolean operators to refine your search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boolean operator</th>
<th>Search Examples</th>
<th>What does this retrieve?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AND (narrows)</td>
<td>Methadone AND Scotland</td>
<td>Results which include all the keywords you have chosen in the same record.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity (different in each system) n stands for ‘any number’ Library Articles – “word word”~n OVID – adjn Web of Science – near/n Google – AROUND(n)</td>
<td>“critical care”~3 primary adj3 care NHS near/3 policy</td>
<td>Results that contain all the words you have chosen with the words close together, for example within 3 or 5 words of each other, in any order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR (expands)</td>
<td>RAO OR “recurrent airway obstruction” Cancer OR neoplasms OR tumour</td>
<td>Results which include one or more of the keywords you have chosen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Use truncation
Most databases allow for a symbol to be used at the end of a word to retrieve variant endings of that word. This is called a truncation symbol - *, ?, $ etc.

For example:
- nurs* will find: nurse, nursing, nurses
- cancer* will find cancer, cancers, cancerous

The symbol may vary in each database you use - the on-screen help will tell you which is used - but in each case it will perform the same function.

4. Use wildcards
Some databases allow for wildcards to be used. A wildcard is a special character inserted in the middle of a search term to retrieve words containing any character or no character in the designated position. The wildcard symbol is normally ?

For example:
- wom?n will retrieve woman or women
- tumo?r will retrieve tumour or tumor

5. Use brackets ( ) to group portions of Boolean queries for more complex searches.

For example:
- diet AND (obes* OR overweight)
- Scotland AND (opioid* OR methadone*)

6. Use the on-screen help
Use the ‘Help’ feature on the database if you are having problems. This is normally on the top right of the screen.

7. Library help
If you want further help in researching a particular topic, please contact:

College Library Support Team  www.gla.ac.uk/clst
- library-college-support@glasgow.ac.uk
- Tel. 0141 330 2601
- Or book an appointment online at:
  o  https://sharepoint.gla.ac.uk/_layouts/AppointmentService/FastBook.aspx?MeetingTypeld=43