



Library and Knowledge Services

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Getting started with EBSCO – Quick start guide



EBSCO is a specialist tool that allows you to search a variety of different databases such as CINAHL, Medline and Health Business Elite. This help sheet provides an overview of how to use EBSCO to find research literature such as journal articles.

STEP 1 – Register for NHS OpenAthens

OpenAthens is the password system that allows you access online resources subscribed to locally by UHCW and nationally via NICE. You can register for an OpenAthens account by visiting <https://openathens.nice.org.uk> while using an NHS PC, ideally with an NHS email address. If you are unable to do this, it will take longer for your account to be authorised.

STEP 2 – Plan your search

Before you begin using EBSCO, it's a good idea to think about the search terms you want to use. It can be helpful to frame your topic as a short sentence, or as a question, to help you break it down into its key concepts and keywords. From here, you should also consider alternative terms. Ask yourself if there are any other ways to describe the concept you are searching: try synonyms, singular and plural variations, UK/US spellings etc.

STEP 3 – Choose a database

You'll also need to choose the most appropriate database(s) for your topic or research area. Visit the Library homepage and explore the resources down the left-hand side of the page to learn more about their subject coverage: <http://tinyurl.com/uhcwlib>

Once you've chosen where you want to search, click the appropriate link and login with your OpenAthens username and password. This guide demonstrates using EBSCO to search CINAHL.

MEDLINE (EBSCO or Ovid)

EBSCO's MEDLINE Complete includes thousands of full text PDFs. [Click here to log in with your UHCW Athens username & password](#)

OVID's MEDLINE also offers some special links if you are just wanting to search the daily update file or the Epub-ahead-of-print sections. These are useful for more detailed evidence-based searching. [Click a list item for UHCW Athens login](#):

Note: Some databases like Medline are available to search in multiple tools. For the purposes of this guide, make sure you follow the link to EBSCO.

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STEP 4 – The Search Screen

The screenshot shows the EBSCOhost search interface. At the top left is the EBSCOhost logo. The search status is 'Searching: CINAHL Complete' with a link to 'Choose Databases'. A checkbox for 'Suggest Subject Terms' is checked. There are three search input fields, each with a 'Select a Field (optional)' dropdown menu. The first field has a dropdown menu set to 'AND'. Below the search fields are navigation links: 'Basic Search', 'Advanced Search', 'PICO Search', and 'Search History'. On the right side, there is a green 'Search' button, a 'Create Alert' link, a 'Clear' link with a question mark, and plus/minus buttons. Numbered callouts point to: 1) the first search input field, 2) the 'Search' button, 3) the 'Suggest Subject Terms' checkbox, 4) the 'AND' dropdown menu, 5) the 'Choose Databases' link, and 6) the 'Select a Field (optional)' dropdown menu for the third search field.

- 1) **Search box** – enter your search terms here.
- 2) **Search** – click this button to run a keyword search.
- 3) **Suggest Subject Terms** – make sure this box is ticked before clicking Search in order to find Subject Headings.
- 4) **Search operators** – use these operators to combine your individual search lines.
- 5) **Databases** – check here to see which database you are searching and click 'Change' to try another.
- 6) **Select a Field** – choose where you would like to search for a keyword e.g. title, abstract etc.

STEP 5 – Subject Terms

Subject Terms (also known as Subject Headings) are specific terms assigned to articles to describe the content of that article. It can be helpful to see if there are any terms related to your topic as they help cater for things like spelling variations. Make sure the '**Suggest Subject Terms**' box is ticked before you click the search button:

Searching: **CINAHL Complete**
 Suggest Subject Terms

EBSCO will compare your term to the list of subject terms that have been used in the database you are searching. You might find an exact match or be presented with a list of close matches. If you aren't sure which one to choose, try clicking on the 'Scope' note on the right-hand side for more detail on how that term has been used:

The screenshot shows the 'Results For: eating disorders' page. At the top, there is a green header with the text 'Results For: eating disorders'. Below the header, there are instructions: 'Check box to view subheadings.' and 'Click linked term for tree view.'. On the right side, there are three columns: 'Explode (+)', 'Major Concept', and 'Scope'. Below these columns, there is a question mark icon. At the bottom, there is a list of results, with the first result being 'Eating Disorders'. The 'Scope' column for this result has a red box around it, indicating that it should be clicked for more detail.

Once you've chosen a subject term, you'll also be offered a selection of subheadings to search:

The screenshot shows a search interface with a green header 'Subheadings for: Eating Disorders' and a red 'Search Database' button. On the left, there is a section 'Include All Subheadings' with a checked checkbox and a list of subheadings: 'Blood/BL', 'Cerebrospinal Fluid/CF', and 'Chemically Induced/CI'. On the right, there is a search box with the term 'Eating Disorders' entered. Above the search box are three columns: 'Search Term', 'Explode (+)', and 'Major Concept'. The 'Eating Disorders' term is listed in the 'Search Term' column with checkboxes in the 'Explode (+)' and 'Major Concept' columns.

Ideally, at the beginning of your search you should include all subheadings to ensure you don't miss out on any relevant results. Click '**Search Database**' to add your subject heading to your search history.

Remember: The use of Subject Headings is tightly controlled, so there may not necessarily be one for your topic area. In this case, you will need to explore different keywords to describe your topic.

STEP 6 – Keywords

As mentioned in Step 2, keyword searches need to cater for spelling variations, word endings and synonyms. Capturing all these variations can feel time-consuming, so you might want to try these techniques to make your search more efficient:

Truncation

Try using the * symbol in your keyword search to capture plurals and different word endings. e.g. **reduc*** will find *reduce, reduces, reduced, reduction etc.*

#

Wildcard

Try using the # symbol in your keyword search to substitute a character or none. e.g. **behavior#r** will find *behaviour and behavior.*

N

Proximity Searching

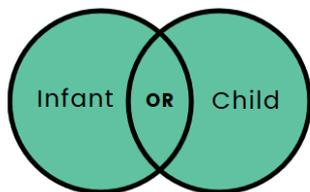
Use the N operator between two keywords to find articles where your keywords appear next to each other, in any order. Add a number to make the search more flexible:

e.g. **lung N3 cancer** will find results where **lung** and **cancer** appear within 3 words of one another.

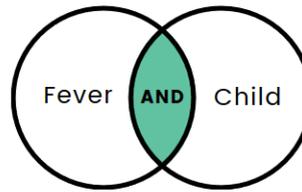
In EBSCO, you need to enter your search terms one by one. Your results will appear in the search history below the search box. Avoid typing whole sentences, or words such as 'in' or 'of' as EBSCO will search for them as an exact phrase.

STEP 7 – Combining searches

Having searched for your keywords and subject headings separately, you now need to combine them in order to get a final set of papers that cover all the topics you are interested in.



Use the OR operator to combine terms that are related to one another.
OR **widens** your search.



Use the AND operator to combine different concepts.
AND **narrows** your search.

Look at this example search below. Here, the user wants to answer the question:

“Is CBT effective at improving the self-esteem of young people with eating disorders?”

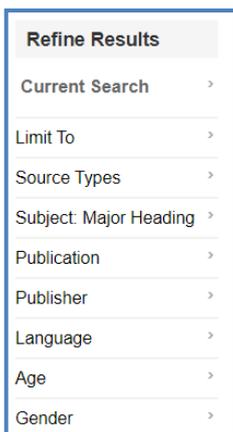
It is by no means exhaustive but gives you an idea of how your search might look like as you build it within EBSCO.

The screenshot shows a list of search terms in an EBSCO interface. Callout boxes provide explanations for various search techniques used:

- Subject Heading search:** Points to S1 (MH "Eating Disorders") and S2 (MH "Anorexia").
- Keyword search with truncation:** Points to S4 (anorexi* or bullimi*).
- Use OR to combine related terms into one single search line:** Points to S5 (S1 OR S2 OR S3 OR S4).
- Keyword search with wildcard:** Points to S7 (cognitive behavio#ral therap*).
- Use AND to combine each concept for results containing all your search terms:** Points to S13 (S5 AND S8 AND S11 AND S12).

A large summary box on the right states: "This user has searched for both keywords and Subject Headings for each concept and tried applying truncation and wildcards where appropriate. They have also used OR to combine each concept as they go, before using AND at the end of the search."

STEP 8 – Limiting your results



Depending on the nature of your search, you might want to apply limits to your search to remove irrelevant articles. Different databases offer different ways of restricting your search, but common limits include language, publication date or publication type.

In EBSCO, a selection of limits is available 'Refine Results' menu to the left of your search results. Choose those that are relevant and they will be applied automatically to your last search line. You should always apply limits at the end of your search.

STEP 9 – Review your results

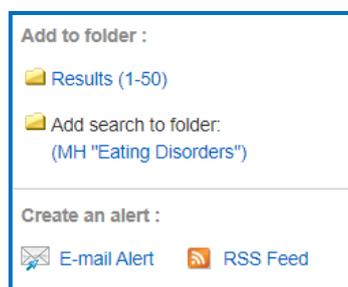
Searching is rarely completely accurate on your first try. You may need to try different combinations of search terms, both keyword and subject headings, to improve the relevancy of your results. If you are getting too many results, you might want to try refining your keywords and adding additional limits. If you are retrieving too few, adding in alternative terms can help. It's also worth checking you have correctly applied both your AND/OR operators. If your papers aren't relevant enough, you should review your search history to see if any of the terms are throwing the search off. If you are getting zero results on any of your search lines, double-check your spelling. You may have already found useful papers elsewhere – perhaps from a Google search. Examine the keywords and subject headings in these papers and build them into your search if you've not used them already.

STEP 10 – Save your search

Save Searches / Alerts

If you haven't already done so, create a personal EBSCO account. This will allow you to save your search strategies so that they can be run again later or saved as an alert so that you can receive email updates when new papers are published. Click the 'Save Searches / Alerts' button above your search history and login when prompted with your EBSCO account details. Give your search a name and a date to make it easy to identify.

The above will only save your search history. Save individual papers by clicking on the folder icon next to the article title. If you want to save more, or email / export them, click the 'Share' link above your search results and a drop-down menu will appear. You can also export from within your saved 'folders' when signed in to your EBSCO account.



Further Help and Support

Visit <http://tinyurl.com/EBSCOOnlineTraining> for video tutorials from the publisher or email beth.jackson@uhcw.nhs.uk and book a 1-2-1 session with your Knowledge Skills Librarian.