12 Tips for a Better Ovid Medline Search

1. Know what you are looking for – structure a query that can be searched

MEDLINE has over 19 million citations, but only a few will be relevant to your needs. Think about your topic: break it into the important parts, such as the problem or subject group, intervention, outcome, and/or type of study.

*Example:* Do clinics for congestive heart failure patients reduce the rate of readmissions or hospitalization? Key concepts are:
- congestive heart failure and related conditions
- outpatient clinics
- hospital readmissions.
You may not need to use all the concepts in the search, but they will be useful in identifying the most appropriate articles.

2. Search with MeSH headings whenever possible

MEDLINE is a very structured database, with subject experts reading each article and assigning specific controlled vocabulary (Medical Subject Headings or MeSH) to describe the article. Using textwords or keywords, searches for the exact word(s) in the title or abstract, which does not guarantee that the word(s) are actually the topic of the article. The mapping feature in Ovid helps you identify the appropriate subject headings or MeSH terms.

*Example:* "esrd" or "end stage renal disease" or "end stage kidney disease" are all mapped to the subject heading, Kidney failure, chronic

3. Always read scope notes

Even if you know the clinical meaning of the word/term, check to see the “indexing” meaning.

*Example:* By checking the scope note for "West Nile Virus" it indicates this MeSH term is about the virus itself. To find articles about the illness caused by this virus, use "West Nile Fever". It may have not have been evident to use "West Nile Fever" without reading this scope note.

4. Search for each concept as a separate set

Break your topic into concepts and search for each one separately. Then, combine the individual sets/concepts. You can then modify your strategy and combinations if needed.

*Example*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. heart failure, congestive</th>
<th>32925</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. exp ambulatory care facilities</td>
<td>17723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 1 and 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Use the "explode" function to broaden your retrieval

"Explode" (exp) includes more specific and relevant terms in your search strategy by automatically "ORing" the broad term and all related terms indented under it.

Example
Heart Failure, Congestive (5146)
     Cardiomyopathy, Congestive (1413)
     Dyspnea, Paroxysmal (3)
     Edema, Cardiac (32)

Selecting Heart Failure, Congestive will find 5146 citations; exploding the term will locate 6332 citations, including all the terms indented under it.

6. Use the "limit" feature

"Limit" excludes inappropriate articles. Common limits such English language and human subjects are listed directly below the command box. Additional limits are listed in the Limit Icon at the top of the screen.

Example
1. nicotine/ 1585
2. limit 1 to clinical trial 89  [limit to publication type]

7. Use the "focus" function to reduce the number of articles found

"Focus" (*) indicates that the MeSH term is the primary focus of the article and its use can result in more relevant retrieval.

Example
1. Kidney Failure, Chronic/ 39485
2. *Kidney Failure, Chronic/ 25586

8. Use "truncation" with textwords

Truncating textwords ($.tw.) searches for a word with various endings.

Example: hypno$.tw. will retrieve hypnosis, hypnotic, hypnotize, etc.
9. Combine Subject Headings (MeSH terms) with textwords

Use for very specific terms or phrases, for which there is no good MeSH.

Example:
1. Administration, Cutaneous 1463
2. patch.tw 6924
3. 1 or 2 8144

10. Use the "subheading" feature to reduce your retrieval

If you are only interested in a specific aspect, consider using appropriate subheadings. (The default is to accept all subheadings.)

Example: methotrexate/ae, to, po, ct will retrieve information on the adverse effects, toxicity, contraindications, or poisoning of methotrexate.

11. Search by author, words in the title etc. (using Basic Search)

You can search for very specific pieces of information within the citation. Be sure to use the 2 letter qualifier or the field icon.

Example:
corey $.au.: searches for any author with the last name corey
corey g$.au.: searches for any author with the last name corey, first initial "g" and any second initial 
asthma.ti.: searches for any article with asthma in the title

12. Seek help

1. Ovid Medline provides excellent online help. Click on the help icon.
2. Handouts and tutorials are available at http://gerstein.library.utoronto.ca/research/research-guides/database-help#ovid-medline
3. Ask the librarian at your university or hospital library. They are an excellent source of assistance.

Adapted from:
Duke University Medical Center. (2000) 12 Tips to a Better MEDLINE Search

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May, 2010