Using social science databases to find evidence-based social work research: EBSCO edition

1. Overview

The three social science databases we’ll use:

- Ageline
- Gender Studies Database
- CINAHL

Moles words for effectiveness questions

```
RCT OR randomi* OR random N3 (assign* OR allocat*) OR control* N3 (trial* OR clinical OR treat* OR group* OR condition* OR intervention) OR "clinical trial*" OR "treatment group*" OR "comparison group*" OR "waiting list*" OR "wait list*" OR "waitlist*"
```

What does it mean?

- **OR** tells the search engine to find at least one of the words inside the parentheses.
- The search engine processes the concepts inside the **parentheses** before the concepts outside of the parentheses, just like in algebra.
- The **asterisk** lets you find alternate endings to a word. For example, randomi* will find randomize, randomised, etc.
- The **double quotations** keep more than one word together as a phrase.
- **N** finds search terms that are a specified number of words apart, no matter which word comes first
2. Creating your question

**Sample Question:** For depressed widows or widowers who have lost their spouse within the previous year, does attending a support group, as opposed to no treatment, result in lower levels of depression?

*Write out your own question in this way.*

**Step 1**

Break down the question into its PICO component concepts

- **Person/Population** = widows/widowers within previous year
- **Intervention** = support groups
- **Comparison** = no treatment
- **Outcome** = lower levels of depression

**Step 2**

Write down all the synonyms you can think of to describe each of your PICO concepts

**Step 3**

Choose a relevant database or databases for your search, those that are likely to contain materials relevant to your search.
3. Creating searches

1. Go to the library home page: library.utoronto.ca

2. Click on Popular databases to the left of the main search box

3. From the Popular databases list, scroll down and click on the link for EBSCO

Popular databases

EBSCO (Interdisciplinary)

- ATLA Religion Database (religion)
- Business Source Premier (Business)
- Historical Abstracts (History)
- Humanities Abstracts (Humanities)
- RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (Music)
- view all EBSCO databases

This takes you to the EBSCO search engine interface, which contains many databases. You can search a number of databases simultaneously in EBSCO. We are going to search three today:

- Ageline
- Gender Studies Database
- CINAHL
4. In EBSCO, click on the checkbox next to the databases you want to use in your search. Then click continue.

The databases you’re searching will now appear above the search box. Click “Show all” to verify.

Before you do any searching, create a My EBSCOhost account by clicking on the sign in link in the top right corner of the screen. This account will let you save your searches and come back to them later.
5. Back on the Advanced Search screen, paste the EBSCO MOLES words in the first search box

```
Searching: AgeLine, Show all | Choose Databases
RCT OR randomi* OR random N3 (assign* Select a Field (optional)
```

6. Click Search. The results of the search will appear on the bottom part of the screen. You will also see your search history right below the search boxes. This will be important later.

```
Search History/Alerts
Print Search History | Retrieve Searches | Retrieve Alerts | Save Searches / Alerts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search ID#</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
<th>Search Options</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| S1         | RCT OR randomi* OR random N3 (assign* OR allocate* OR control* OR N3 (trial* OR clinical OR treat* OR group* OR condition* OR intervention) OR "clinical trial" OR "treatment group" OR "comparison group" OR "waiting list" OR "wait list" OR "waitlist"
Search modes - Boolean/Phrase | View |
```

Now you’ve completed one portion of the search. We’re going to proceed to the PICO components.

7. Click the clear button to the right of the search box.

8. In the newly blank search box, type the synonyms for ONE of the PICO concepts of the question, ex: “self help group*” OR “self-help group*” OR “support group*” OR “mutual aid group*”

9. Click Search

Repeat steps 7 - 9 until each PICO component has been completed.
4. Combine your search components

Once you have completed each PICO component, you need to combine your searches together.

1. Clear the search form so that there is nothing in any of the search boxes.

2. You will see all of your searches in the “Search History/Alert” section. Click on the checkbox next to the searches that you want to combine.

3. Click the “Search with AND” button.
5. Saving searches

Each search you do is listed in the “Search History/Alert” section. However, they are only saved for the duration of your browser session. Not forever! If you want to come back to your searches later, you can save them to your My EBSCOhost account.

Click on the checkbox next to every search that you want to save, then click “Save searches/Alerts”

Give your searches a name then click save. Make sure that they are set to save permanently.
6. Examine your results

On the *Search Results* page, you can:

- Change the default display by Relevance to by Date
- Use the left-hand bar to modify your search by limiting to academic journals, by date, etc.
- Look for keywords that help to better describe your research subject so you can add it to your PICO string.
- Click the *Get It! button* to see if the full text of an article is available
- For those marked as being available in *Dissertations Abstracts International*, go to the database, *EBSCO Dissertations & Theses Global* and look for the full text or an extensive abstract. This database is in ProQuest.
- Add relevant results to your folder so you can email them or export to a citation manager like RefWorks.

Questions?

- [http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/SWK4510](http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/SWK4510)
- judith.logan@utoronto.ca