OVID MEDLINE SEARCH TIPS

OVID MEDLINE AT THE BIRD LIBRARY
The Ovid interface provides a user friendly environment for searching including features that facilitate the use of MeSH, the controlled vocabulary used to index content for MEDLINE. OUHSC faculty, students, and staff can access Ovid MEDLINE both on and off campus by clicking on the Ovid MEDLINE link provided on the Bird Library’s home page (http://library.ouhsc.edu).

SEARCHING WITH MEDICAL SUBJECT HEADINGS (MeSH)
- MeSH is the controlled vocabulary used to index articles for the MEDLINE database
- MeSH is arranged in both an alphabetic and hierarchical structure and it is developed and maintained by specialized staff members at the National Library of Medicine (NLM)
- Ovid MEDLINE defaults to automatically map users to relevant MeSH terms, if available, for whatever word or phrase is entered into the search box

Advantages of MeSH Searching
- Synonyms, alternative spellings, and similar variations which describe the same concept are typically brought together under a single MeSH term
- When you search with MeSH terms you have access to tools that are not available when you search using keywords including:
  - MeSH Tree – click on the hyperlinked MeSH term to view related terms that are more general (broader) and more specific (narrower) than your selected term
  - Scope Note – typically includes the definition of the MeSH term, year of entry, information about previous indexing, related MeSH terms, and synonyms
  - Explode – makes it easy to expand your retrieval for any given concept by including results indexed with your selected MeSH term and all of its more specific terms
  - Focus – makes it easy to narrow your retrieval to only those documents in which your selected MeSH term is considered to be a major point in the article
  - Subheadings – can be used to narrow the focus of your search by emphasizing a particular aspect; options will vary depending upon your selected MeSH term and multiple subheadings can be applied

SEARCHING WITH KEYWORDS
- When conducting keyword searches you are responsible for figuring out synonyms, alternate spellings, and other variations that may need to be incorporated into the search to adequately cover your concept
- Keyword searching may be your best option when:
  - you can’t find a MeSH term for your concept
  - the MeSH term is relatively new and you need to obtain earlier literature
  - you need to search for a precise word or phrase, such as a brand name, in fields like the title and abstract

BOOLEAN OPERATORS
Three Boolean operators are commonly used to combine concepts when searching:

AND
- Decreases retrieval
- Retrieves records that contain all concepts connected by the operator
- Concepts can be entered in any order

OR
- Often used to combine related concepts or synonyms
- Increases retrieval
• Retrieves records that contain any of the concepts connected by the operator
• Concepts can be entered in any order

NOT
• Use with caution so that you do not eliminate relevant results
• Retrieves records that exclude the concept following the operator
• Decreases retrieval
• Order does matter (e.g. the search statement acupuncture therapy NOT neck pain will retrieve different results from the search statement neck pain NOT acupuncture therapy)

OTHER SEARCH TOOLS
• Limits – can be applied to make your retrieval even more relevant to your needs
  o Commonly used limits in MEDLINE are available on the main Ovid search page and include language, publication year, and human
  o To see all available limits, including options to narrow your retrieval by specific age groups or type of publication (e.g. randomized controlled trial, meta-analysis, practice guideline, etc.), click the “Additional Limits” button.
• Truncation – is used at the end of a word stem to search for variations
  o In Ovid, the dollar sign ($), colon (:), or asterisk (*) can be used
  o Example: toxic$ retrieves references containing toxic, toxicity, toxicology, toxicological, toxicologist, etc.

TIPS FOR BROADENING OR NARROWING YOUR SEARCH
• For a comprehensive search:
  o Explode MeSH terms whenever possible
  o Do not focus MeSH terms
  o Do not attach subheadings to MeSH terms
  o Apply limits sparingly
  o Consider searching multiple databases and further back in time
• To search for a few, highly relevant articles:
  o Do not explode MeSH terms
  o Focus one or more of the MeSH terms used in the search
  o Attach any relevant subheadings to your MeSH term(s)
  o Utilize limits as needed

SHORTCUTS (COMMAND SYNTAX)
To conduct searches faster and more efficiently, the Ovid interface supports a number of shortcuts which you can enter directly into the search box:
• ..ps – displays your current search history and loads it in your browser window for easy print/capture
• * - an asterisk, followed by a MeSH term or a set number created with MeSH, will narrow your retrieval to only focused results
• exp – preceding a MeSH term will automatically explode the term and include all narrower subject headings
• .mp. – follow a word, or word stem if using truncation, with this syntax so that Ovid will search for your word or phrase in MEDLINE’s default fields (title, abstract, MeSH headings, etc.)

HELP
• Look for the information icon throughout the Ovid interface for context specific help
• Consult the MEDLINE Database Guide (http://ospguides.ovid.com/OSPguides/medline.htm) for a comprehensive list of command syntax shortcuts and other relevant information
• Use the convenient “Ask an OUHSC Librarian” link at the top of every Ovid page
• Review the Bird Library’s Searching in Ovid LibGuide (http://libguides.ouhsc.edu/ovid)