Searching CINAHL with Full Text Database

1) Select CINAHL from the Health Sciences Library Home Page (under “Popular Resources”).

2) CINAHL uses “controlled vocabulary” subject headings (search terms or concepts) to provide the most relevant & precise search results. That is why our version of CINAHL defaults to the Advanced Search mode.

3) CINAHL does not search like Google. If you try to put multiple concepts into one search statement (ex. - “blood pressure and ischemic stroke”), you will probably not find much. For the best results, search each concept separately.

4) On the CINAHL Home (Search History) Page, type a search term in the top search box and click “Search” button or “Enter” key. Search term may be one or more words. (“asthma” or “shared governance” or “nursing care plans”) The system will try to find the closest match in the CINAHL Subject Headings.

5) A list of possible subject headings should display. Select the most appropriate heading by clicking on the blue underlined term. This will display the “Tree View,” which will show if your term can be “exploded” (expanded). (You may need to scroll down to find your term again.) Click the “Explode” box to the right if you want to include all the related terms that are indented under your original term. (Not all subject headings can be exploded.) Use “Explode” to widen a search. (ex. - Search all “skin diseases” simultaneously.)

6) Click “Major Concept” box to right of “Explode” box if you want this term (or exploded terms) to be a main point in your references. (Selecting “Major Concept” should lead to retrieving the most relevant results.) Don’t click “Major Concept” if you are getting very little retrieval & need to widen your search.

7) A subheadings list for your search term is displayed on the right. You can skip it if you want to include everything for the term. However, if you want to narrow your search to specific aspects of your topic, choose as many subheadings as you want. (Subheadings include various therapies & diagnostic methods, education, etiology, history, prevention & control, etc.)

8) When finished with search preparation, click “Search Database” bar to perform the search.

9) Search results will be displayed. There may be thousands of references. (Don’t worry about that. We’ll narrow it down later.)

10) If you have more search terms/concepts to add to your search, search each term/concept separately. Repeat steps #4 - #8 for each one. (We’ll combine them later.)

11) You can also search terms that are not CINAHL subject headings, including personal names. (prehabilitation, ofirmev, Florence Nightingale) Type term in search box like usual. You may see the message: “The term(s) you entered could not be found...” Scroll to bottom of terms listed. Click on your term’s box (“Search as keyword”) & click “Search Database” bar.

12) To combine searches, use AND & OR to adjust your results. (Check box for each search result you are adjusting.) Click “Search with OR” button to widen a search (pregnancy” OR “pregnancy complications”). Click “Search with AND” button to narrow a search (“medication errors” AND “home health care”).

13) To limit a search, click “edit” link on far right of the “Search ID” line (S1, S2, S3, etc.). (There also is a quick “Refine Results” but it doesn’t have all possible limits.) You can limit to English language, publication years, age groups, publication types, evidence-based practice, nursing journals (under “Journal Subset”), abstracts available, peer reviewed, etc. Do not limit to full text yet unless you feel that you’ll have plenty of full text articles available. (When you limit to full text in CINAHL, you are restricting your articles to only the CINAHL database. There could be additional full text articles available from other databases using the “Full Text Finder” link.)

14) Before you look at your search results, be sure to click “View Results” link. Otherwise you may see references you thought you got rid of when you limited your search.

15) Results are displayed 50 references per page. Items listed first are those that have been most recently added to the database. What this means is that the newest results are usually displayed first. References get older the further down you scroll.

16) To view the full text of a reference, click “PDF Full Text,” “HTML Full Text,” or “Linked Full Text” in the reference. If full text is not immediately available, try the “Full Text Finder” link to search for full text in other databases. If the Full Text Finder search is successful, click on a link to go directly to article in another database. If full text is not available either in CINAHL or through the Full Text Finder, you can request a copy of item from the Health Sciences Library.

17) To save references or searches to work on later, log in or create a free username & password by clicking “Sign In” in dark blue bar at top of screen. When you are logged in, you’ll see a yellow “My” banner across the EBSCOhost icon & your name on top far right.

18) To narrow search, remove limiting terms from search box using “uncheck” buttons. (You can also use “Edit” to adjust your search.)

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