

General PubMed Search Tips

Tips	Why?
Author search format: LAST FM [au] Example: <i>Savage D [au]</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First names are included in PubMed only for references added since 2002. • Greatest accurate retrieval using last name and 2 initials.
Title search: use the code [ti] Example: <i>homelessness [ti]</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good way to narrow your list of results if you don't need to be comprehensive.
Truncation symbol: * Example: <i>addict*</i> (Retrieves addict, addiction, addicted...)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for different forms of a word, such as plurals or different verb tenses. • Note: Using the asterisk prevents PubMed from automatically translating your search to MeSH terms.
Combine terms using AND, OR, NOT (capitalized) Example: <i>(elderly OR senior OR aged) AND depression</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include synonyms with "OR." • Tell PubMed where one concept ends and another begins by using "AND."
Apply Filters Common filters appear to the left of search results. Can be customized in My NCBI.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow your search by language, publication date, full-text availability, and article type (clinical trial, review).
Search Details Details button on Advanced Search shows exactly how your search strategy was interpreted by PubMed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify useful MeSH terms. • See what went wrong if your search results are not what you expected.
Use the UW Libraries' Guide to PubMed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://guides.lib.uw.edu/hsl/pubmed

One-Time Tasks for Long-Term Benefit

Tips	Why?
Set up a My NCBI account http://guides.lib.uw.edu/hsl/myncbi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See links to your institution's full-text journal articles. • Set up email alerts. • Create collections of references. • Customize filters & site preferences • Use My Bibliography to manage your publications for NIH funding compliance.
Bookmark the proxy bookmarklet. Then click on the saved UW proxy bookmark if you're denied access to a UW-subscribed full-text article. www.lib.washington.edu/help/connect.html	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the proxy signals the publisher that you're affiliated with UW.

Strategies for Advanced PubMed Searchers

Tips	Why?
<p>Only Have a Minute? Search for a “dream title” to find one good reference. Then look for the “Similar Articles” list below the abstract.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a quick list of about 100 references ranked by relevancy when you click on “See all.”
<p>Steps for Building a Good Search Strategy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find 2 or 3 good references and use the MeSH terms they used. 2. Build a strategy using MeSH terms along with individual words or phrases as needed. 3. Apply filters such as “article type,” “languages”, “ages” or a date range. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By starting with 2 or 3 good references, you can find more like them. • Using MeSH terms for key concepts will often retrieve more relevant references. • Incrementally improve your search by adding MeSH terms, your own words, or by applying filters until you get a reasonable number of relevant references.
<p>Identify MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) terms using the MeSH database or a relevant reference.</p> <p><u>Example:</u> <i>Mental Health [mesh]</i> Finds references on mental health in general, and you can choose subheadings to narrow it.</p> <p><u>Example:</u> <i>Depression [mesh]</i> Finds references on depression in a variety of situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero in on references where your topic is a significant focus of the article. • MeSH terms let you include several related terms under one umbrella term. • Combine two or more MeSH terms to narrow your search. • Note: The most recently added references may not yet be indexed with MeSH terms.
<p>Use MeSH Subheadings if appropriate</p> <p><u>Example:</u> <i>“Food Addiction/therapy” [mesh]</i> <i>“Depression/therapy” [mesh]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you select a MeSH term, you can further limit your search to a particular aspect of that subject, such as “ethics,” “therapeutic use,” or “immunology.”
<p>Phrase searching Enclose a phrase in quotation marks.</p> <p><u>Example:</u> <i>“art therapy”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful if there is no good MeSH term. • Also useful for locating very recent, unindexed references. • Only retrieves references where your <i>exact</i> phrase is used. • NOT comprehensive. Only works for <u>selected</u> frequently-occurring phrases.
<p>Advanced Search mode for modifying, combining, or excluding past searches. Also offers a “fill-in-the-blank” search interface.</p> <p><u>Example:</u> <i>#5 NOT #3</i> [if you looked at the results from search #3]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclude references you’ve already reviewed. • Try different combinations and modifications of past searches. • Build a strategy using pull-down menus.