General PubMed Search Tips

Tips	Why?
Author search format: LAST FM [au] Example: ***Disis ML [au]***	• 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: ***fissure sealants [ti]***	• Good way to narrow your list of results if you don't need to be comprehensive.
Truncation symbol: * Example: ***isolat**** (Retrieves Isolate, Isolated, Isolating, Isolation…)	• 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: ***(pharmacogenetics OR pharmacogenomics) AND hepatitis C***	• Include synonyms with "OR." • Tell PubMed where one concept ends and another begins by using "AND."
Apply Filters Common filters appear to the left and the right of search results. Can be customized in My NCBI.	• Narrow your search by language, publication date, full-text availability, and article type (clinical trial, review).
Search Details Box on the right side of the search results page shows exactly how your search strategy was interpreted by PubMed.	• Identify useful MeSH terms. • See what went wrong if your search results are not what you expected.
Use the UW Libraries' Guide to PubMed	• 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	• 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	• Using the proxy signals the publisher that you're affiliated with UW.

Strategies for Advanced PubMed Searchers

Tips	Why?
Only Have a Minute? Search for a "dream title" to find one good reference. Then look for the "Similar Articles" list to the right of the abstract.	• Get a quick list of about 100 references ranked by relevancy when you click on "See all."
Steps for Building a Good Search Strategy 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 "clinical trials," "review," or a date range.	• By starting with 2 or 3 good references, you can find more like them. • Using MeSH terms for key concepts will 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.
Identify MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) terms using the MeSH database or a relevant reference. Example: **Fibroblast Growth Factors [mesh]** Finds references on FGFs in general, as well as specifically named FGFs, e.g., FGF-2, FGF-7. Example: **Tryptamines [mesh]** Finds references on a class of drugs, as well as specific drugs within that class, e.g., Sumatriptan.	• 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.
Use MeSH Subheadings if appropriate Example: **Genome-Wide Association Study/ethics[mesh]**	• 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."
Phrase searching Enclose a phrase in quotation marks. Example: **"single cell"**	• Useful if there is no good MeSH term. • Also useful for locating very recent, unindexed references. • Only retrieves references where your exact phrase is used. • NOT comprehensive. Only works for selected frequently-occurring phrases.
Advanced Search mode for modifying, combining, or excluding past searches. Also offers a "fill-in-the-blank" search interface. Example: **#5 NOT #3** [if you looked at the results from search #3]	• Exclude references you've already reviewed. • Try different combinations and modifications of past searches. • Build a strategy using pull-down menus.

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