



6 Simple Steps to a Successful Literature Search

Step 1: Decide on your research question in your own words

For example: "Discuss the closure of residential care homes for older people".

Step 2: Define the terms and concepts

Break down the question into key topic areas and identify keywords, phrases, synonyms and alternative spellings. For example, in this case the question could be broken down into the following topic areas:



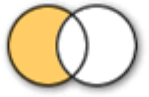
"Discuss the **closure** of residential **care homes** for **older people**".

Topic 1	Topic 2:	Topic 3:
Closure/resettlement	Care homes	Older people
Clos* (close, closing, closure etc)	Care home* (care home, care homes, care homes for older people)	Old* (old, older, old age etc)
Resettlement	Care management*	Age (age, aged, ageing etc)
Patient transfer	Community home*	Geriatric*
Health facility closure	Residential home*	Frail elderly people
Service closures	Residential care*	Elder* (elderly, elder, elderly people)
"care home closure"	(residential care, residential care for the elderly)	Very old people

Don't forget to use truncation, namely the use of the symbol \$ or * on the root of a word, as a means of capturing all relevant material. E.g. "old\$" will pick up ; old, older, old age etc

Step 3: Use Boolean operators

After identifying the key concepts decide how best to combine these concepts using the Boolean operators of **OR**, **AND** or **NOT**.

OR	Old\$ OR age\$ OR elderly	 <p>Retrieves records containing either terms</p>
AND	Old\$ AND care home*	 <p>Retrieves records containing both terms</p>
NOT	Care homes NOT United States	 <p>Excludes records containing the second term</p>

Step 4: Limit your search

- Language of publication, e.g. English only
- Publication types, e.g. journal articles randomised controlled trials, patient information, websites etc.
- Year of publication, e.g. 2010 onwards
- Age group, e.g. adult/adolescent/elderly/all ages
- Country of origin, e.g. UK, USA, or global

Step 5: Select the right database

Search the databases that best reflect your subject area/s:

- **ABI/Inform:** Searches respected historical business journals for topics such as: corporate strategies, management techniques, accounting, marketing, advertising, ethics, case studies. Full runs of some of the most important business journals of the last century, all in cover-to-cover full page images, just as they were printed.

- **AMED:** 1985 to present. Provides an alternative medicine database including complementary medicine, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, rehabilitation, podiatry, palliative care. AMED contains basic bibliographic records (plus abstracts for many records from 1995 onward) for relevant articles from over 500 journals. Scope of coverage is mainly European. Many of the journals included in AMED are not indexed by other biomedical sources. AMED is produced by the Health Care Information Service of the British Library.
- **ASSIA:** ASSIA on the Web is an indexing and abstracting tool covering health, social services, economics, politics, race relations and education. Updated monthly, ASSIA provides a comprehensive source of social science and health information for the practical and academic professional.
- **CINAHL:** Authoritative resource for information in subject areas such as nursing, biomedicine, alternative/complementary medicine, consumer health and 17 allied health disciplines such as occupational therapy, social services in healthcare, nutrition and dietetics published 1982 onwards. Full-text access to 70 journals and other relevant publications. Complete coverage of English language publications from the National League for Nursing and the American Nurses' Association. The MeSH-based subject thesaurus is updated annually and a particularly useful search tool.
- **Cochrane:** The Cochrane Library is a unique source of reliable and up-to-date information on the effects of interventions in fields as diverse as diagnostic tests, public health, health promotion, pharmacology, surgery, psychology and the organization and delivery of healthcare. Includes DARE (Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects), which contains abstracts of quality-assessed systematic reviews. Each abstract includes a summary of the review together with a critical commentary about the overall quality.
- **Embase:** EMBASE, the Excerpta Medica database, is a major biomedical and pharmaceutical database indexing over 3,500 international journals in the following fields: drug research, pharmacology, pharmaceuticals, toxicology, clinical and experimental human medicine, health policy and management, public health, occupational health, environmental health, drug dependence and abuse, psychiatry, forensic medicine, and biomedical engineering/instrumentation. There is selective coverage for nursing, dentistry, veterinary medicine, psychology, and alternative medicine. EMBASE is one of the most widely used biomedical and pharmaceutical databases because of its in-depth indexing. Frequent updates allow access to the latest medical and pharmacological trends. Approximately 375,000 records are added yearly.
- **HMIC:** An invaluable source of information for health care administrators and managers, this database covers health management and policy. It is produced by the Healthcare Management Information Consortium (HMIC). Updated bi-monthly and contains essential information from two key institutions: the Library and Information Services of the Department of Health and the King's Fund Information and Library Service. Focus on UK.
- **Medline:** Particularly useful for biomedical literature published 1946 onwards. Compiled by the National Library of Medicine of the United States and MeSH-indexed. Currently covers 5,600 international scholarly journals in 40 languages, in addition to a small number of relevant newspapers, magazines, and newsletters. US bias.

Step 6: Start searching!

HSMC Library and Information Service — Park House — 40 Edgbaston Park Road — Birmingham — B15 2RT.

Website: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/hsmc-library/index.aspx>

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