

Lecture 4 · July 2025

Review of the Literature

Instructor: Atalay Demiray, MD, MSc

Yale School of Public Health · Department of Health Policy and Management

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Introduction to Research Review of the Literature

Atalay Demiray, MD, MSc
Department of Health Policy and Management

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Recap – Reading I (The Craft of Research Book)



Objectives

- Define and discuss why the review of the literature is important
- List the elements of a successful literature review
- Create a list of searchable databases
- Develop keywords for a literature search

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Characteristics of A Well-Done Literature Review

- Provides an overview of existing research
- “Maps the territory” of the study topic
- Identifies gaps in the literature
- Identifies core issues for this area of study
- Further clarifies the “so what?” of the question

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Database Searching

Keyword searching: Results not necessarily related to the topic

- Similar to Google search
- System searches for each term entered

Subject heading searching

- Ensures citations are about the topic searched
- Uses terms from a controlled vocabulary for that discipline

The best approach to searching for subject terms:

- Search for each term separately
- Then combine them

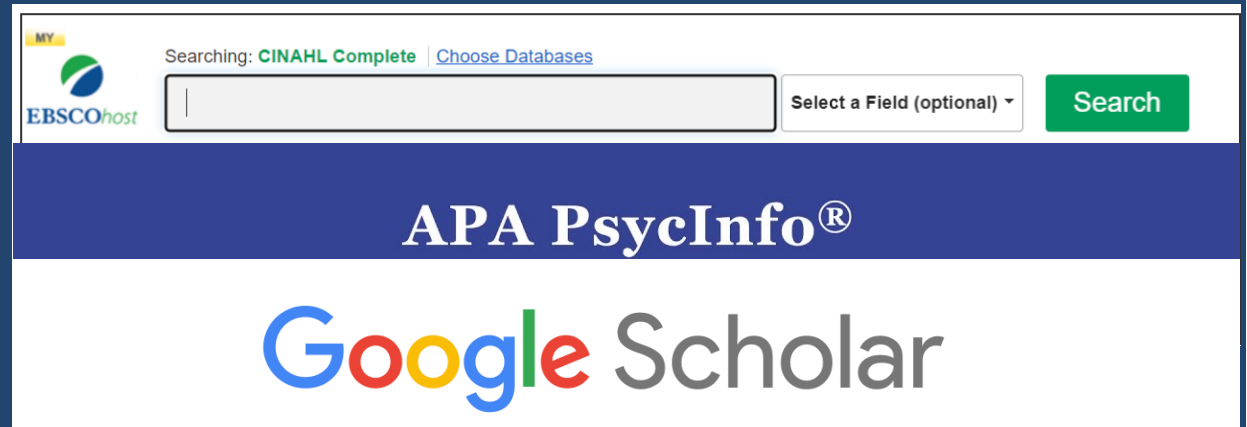
Most databases have at least two options:

- OR (pools two or more sets)
- AND (each individual item must be present)

You can also search by author, journal title, publication type, research type, questionnaire, and other indexed fields.

Specific Databases

- MEDLINE - PubMed
- CINAHL
- PsycINFO
- Google Scholar
- Web of Science
- Scopus



MY
EBSCOhost

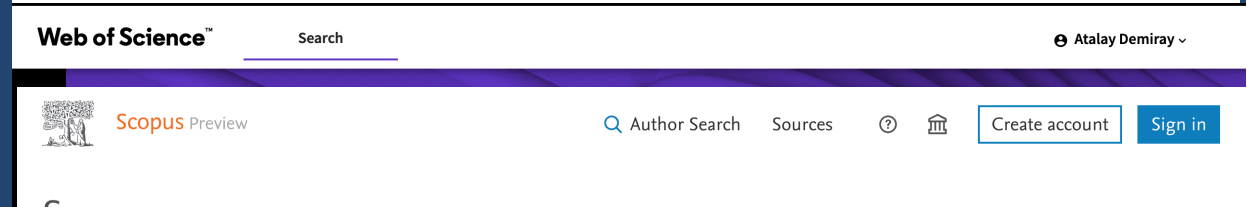
Searching: CINAHL Complete | [Choose Databases](#)

Select a Field (optional) ▾

Search

APA PsycInfo®

Google Scholar



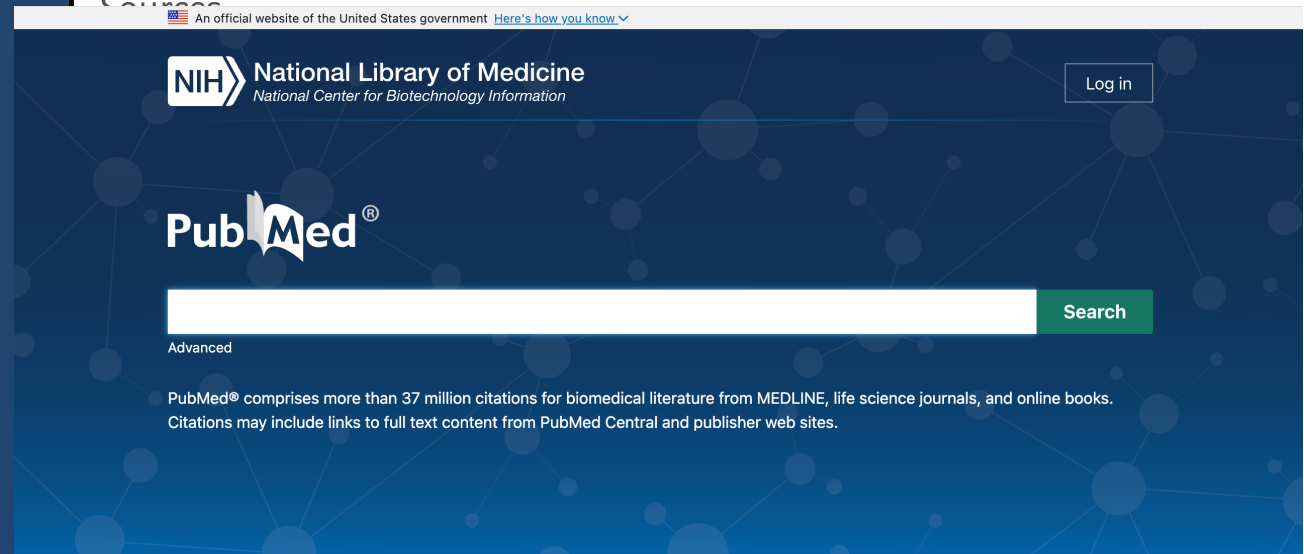
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Author Search Sources ? ⓘ

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PubMed® comprises more than 37 million citations for biomedical literature from MEDLINE, life science journals, and online books. Citations may include links to full text content from PubMed Central and publisher web sites.

How to run a successful literature search?

1. Define your search question
2. Think about the search terms to use
3. Decide how to combine the concepts
4. Think about any limits you want to apply
5. Decide which literature databases to use
6. Manage your references

1- Define your search question

Every good literature search begins with some thinking about your search topic and how you want to refine it.

- For example, you may just want to get an overview of end of life care for people living with frailty. In which case it might be helpful to narrow your search to find systematic reviews on the topic.
- **Systematic reviews** provide clear and comprehensive overviews of the evidence on a particular topic.
- You can also search for published systematic reviews in medicine and health sciences in bibliographic databases such as PubMed.
- But perhaps you are interested more particularly in advance care planning amongst this population group. Then reframe your topic as a question – for example, **“Do older people living with frailty at the end of life want to engage in advance care planning conversations?”**

2- Think about the search terms to use

Identify the main concepts of the question.

Using the advance care planning example above, there are four major elements:
Older people; Frailty; End of life; Advance care planning.

- **Keyword searching** means you can search free text words and phrases
- Use **truncation** (usually one of these symbols: \$ or *) to broaden your search and help find word variants. For example, Elder* will look for the elderly and elderly.

Older people	Frailty	End of life	Advance care planning
Elderly	Frail elderly	Palliative	Anticipatory care planning
Aged		Hospice	Advance directives
Old people		Death	
		Dying	

3- Decide how to combine the concepts

Use **Boolean operators** to combine your search terms. These words used to link concepts are: **AND, OR, NOT**. Most databases will use buttons so that you can combine the elements of your search.

- **AND** Use this to find articles which mention each of the topics you are looking for.
- **OR** Use this when you are trying out variants of a term, or where you are happy for any of the concepts to be in the results list.
- **NOT** Use this to exclude a particular concept. Think carefully about using this option because you could exclude relevant results.

Using Boolean operators means our search could look something like this:

(“advance care plan” OR “advance care planning” OR “anticipatory care planning” OR “anticipatory care plan”) AND (frailty OR frail) AND (“older people” OR elderly OR aged) AND (“end of life” OR death OR dying OR hospice OR palliative)

4- Think about any limits you want to apply: Commonly used restrictions on literature searches include language, for example, where people want publications written in English only. Limiting searches to material published within a certain **timeframe** can also be helpful. Many databases will also let you limit your search in other ways, such as according to **publication type** (e.g. systematic reviews).

- Be sure to apply any limits at the end of your search when you have got a list of results.

5- Decide which literature databases to use: Choose the databases which best match your area of interest. Your local health library will be able to help you access more resources. For example, PubMed, Web of Science, Scopus, etc.

6- Manage your references: Take some time to get to know reference management software. By using these tools, you can collect references from different databases and save them in one place. Examples of reference management software with free versions include EndNote, Mendeley and Zotero.

Writing the Literature Review

- Summary of what is known (not known) in the research topic area
- Discussion of previous research, not a list of references
- Purpose is to utilize information from a variety of sources to synthesize and articulate your ideas
- Begin with a brief introduction summarizing the research question, resources used for the literature review, and search strategies.
- Summarize the results of the review.
 - Discuss key points.
 - Reference quoted information.
 - Include gaps in the existing research and areas of weakness or controversy.

Questions



Read

Chapter 5: From Problems to Sources

Chapter 6: Engaging Sources

Additional Online Resources

NHS Modules for Literature Search

<https://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/Catalogue>

<https://youtu.be/1otz5qrUbxo?feature=shared>

“ The essence of mastering literature search isn’t found in lectures; it’s in hands-on practice. So, grab your computer—it’s practice time.

- Atalay Demiray