

# My search is not finding the information I want.

## A guide to editing your search

This guide gives brief information on how to edit and update your search. There is more help on the Library webpages at [www.lshtm.ac.uk/library/help/help.html](http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/library/help/help.html)

### I can't find any information

If you're having problems finding information, there are a few things you can look at.

1. Are you searching a relevant source of information?

Does the database cover the topic you are interested in? Does it include the type of information you are looking for?

Remember that if you can't find something, it may be because it's not there, not because of any problems with your search.

2. Are you using relevant search terms?

Are you using all of the synonyms, abbreviations etc that you can?

Remember to include truncation (adding an asterisk to your terms). Both of these tips make a huge difference.

Does the database you are using have a thesaurus? If so, are you using it?

If you find some relevant information, look at the words and phrases used by the authors in the title and abstract, are there any you can add to your search? Are you including all of the relevant subject headings?

3. Are you combining your terms together properly?

Have you used AND and OR in the correct way?

If these tips make no difference, try widening out your search, be less specific. Try searching a different resource.

Remember, the problem may not always be with your search. Sometimes there is not much information to find on your topic.

### I am finding too much information

If you're overwhelmed with the amount of information you have found, you can try to make your search a bit more specific. Around 300 results for a search is about average. Try the following tips:

1. Make your search question more specific.

You may find it easier to break your topic down into smaller chunks.

2. Use filters and limits

These can be used to restrict your results to particular study types or particular groups of patients. See [www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/intertasc/](http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/intertasc/) for a collection of filters for different study types.



## **I am finding lots of irrelevant information**

If you find you are getting lots of results which are not relevant to you, try to work out why. Most search systems highlight your search terms in the results. This allows you to work out which terms retrieved each item. If the same search terms appear in most irrelevant results, could you remove them from your search without missing out on relevant material?

Sometimes a word or phrase means two different things to two different specialities.

### **For example**

I was running a search on the use of PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) in teaching. I discovered that PDA stands for (among other things): patent ductus arteriosus, photodiode array, potato dextrose agar, piperidine-dicarboxylic acid, pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma or posterior descending artery.

A close look at my results showed that articles about handheld computers nearly always called a PDA a personal digital assistant or used another synonym, as well as the abbreviation. So I decided to drop the abbreviation from my search.

## **I know of some information which is not appearing in my results**

Sometimes you will already have some relevant information – maybe your tutor has given you some journal articles – yet these are not appearing in your results making you worry about other things you may not be finding.

1. Have a look at the words and phrases the authors of your information use. Are there any which you can insert into your search?
2. Does the resource you are searching contain details of the items you are not finding. Sometimes you may not be retrieving it because it is not there, not because of any problems with your search.

## **I'm sure I've missed some search terms, how can I make my search better?**

Many people publish details of their search strategy. You can use these as the basis for your search. Some good places to look include: Cochrane Library ([www.thecochranelibrary.com](http://www.thecochranelibrary.com)), NICE ([www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)), SIGN (Scottish equivalent of NICE [www.sign.ac.uk](http://www.sign.ac.uk)), Campbell Collaboration ([www.campbellcollaboration.org](http://www.campbellcollaboration.org)). Although it is unlikely you will find a search which exactly matches your subject area, you can use these search strategies for ideas.