

Search strategy worksheet

1. Define your topic

Summarise your topic in one or two sentences. Try to state it in the form of a question.

2. Identify the main concepts

Your topic is often comprised of a relationship between several variables or concepts. Pick out the main ideas or concepts from your search statement. You will usually have between two and four concepts. The more concepts you have, the more specific your topic.

Examples:

Topic: What is the quality of life for low vision patients?

1st concept: **low vision** 2nd concept: **quality of life**

Topic: Astigmatism as a complication of cataract surgery

1st concept: **cataract surgery** 2nd concept: **complications** 3rd concept: **astigmatism**

Topic: What are the treatment options and outcomes for keratoconus?

1st concept: **keratoconus** 2nd concept: **treatment**

1 st concept	AND	2 nd concept	AND	3 rd concept	AND	4 th concept

3. Develop a list of search terms

For each concept in your topic, list other words that could be used in writing about that concept. This includes synonyms, related terms, and broader or narrower terms. Consulting textbooks, dictionaries, and subject indexes of journal databases will assist with this.

1 st concept	AND	2 nd concept	AND	3 rd concept	AND	4 th concept
or		or		or		or
or		or		or		or
or		or		or		or

4. Combine search terms to create a search statement

Create a few possible search statements by combining terms using the **AND** and **OR** connectors.

Use parentheses around the **OR**s. E.g. (*treatment OR therapy OR surgery*)

Use truncation symbols to find all word endings. E.g. *Diabet** will find diabetic and diabetes.

Use quotations marks around phrases. E.g. "*diabetic retinopathy*"

Combine all your concepts to narrow your results, or use only the main concepts to obtain more results

Example:

Keratoconus AND (treat OR therapy OR correct* OR surg*)*

5. Repeat!

After you have done your initial searching and found some relevant articles, you might identify some new concepts or subtopics which you would like to explore further. Simply repeat the steps above for each new subtopic.

Example: After finding some interesting articles on *Keratoconus*, I would like to know more about some of the specific treatment options such as *keratoplasty*. My next search statement would look like this:

(keratoplasty OR "corneal transplant") AND keratoconus