



How to Improve Database Search Results

No References or Too Few References

- Look for misspellings in your strategy.
- Decrease the number of concepts searched.
- Try a broader search term.
- Use a term from the thesaurus (i.e., MeSH or subject heading list) for searching.
- Use the Related Articles or Similar Articles feature.
- Check for missing or incorrect field qualifiers.
- Remove terms that are unlikely to be used by an author.
- Replace terms that are either too general or too specific.
- Increase the number of synonyms or alternatives for a term.
- Use a truncation symbol at the end of a term to pick up variant endings.
- Try running the search on earlier years (back files) of the database.
- Try a different database.

Too Many References

- Choose the most specific subject headings or most significant key words.
- Use subheadings if appropriate.
- Increase the number of search concepts that are ANDed together.
- Use fewer synonyms for terms.
- Make a term from the thesaurus (i.e. subject heading list) the major focus of the article (“major” in PubMed and “focus” in CINAHL)
- Limit to review articles.
- Limit your search to type of article, language, age group, current years, etc.
- Ask for significant words to be in the TITLE of the article.

October 2006

<http://media.hsl.washington.edu/media/schnall/searchtips.doc>