General PubMed Search Tips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Author** search format: LAST FM [au]  
Example: *Disis ML [au]* | • First names are included in PubMed only for references added since 2002.  
• Greatest accurate retrieval using last name and 2 initials. |
| **Title search**: use the code [ti]  
Example: *fissure sealants [ti]* | • Good way to narrow your list of results if you don’t need to be comprehensive. |
| **Truncation symbol**: *  
Example: *isolat*  
(Retrieves Isolate, Isolated, Isolating, Isolation…) | • Allow for different forms of a word, such as plurals or different verb tenses.  
• Note: Using the asterisk prevents PubMed from automatically translating your search to MeSH terms. |
| **Combine terms** using AND, OR, NOT (capitalized)  
Example: *(pharmacogenetics OR pharmacogenomics) AND hepatitis C* | • Include synonyms with “OR.”  
• Tell PubMed where one concept ends and another begins by using “AND.” |
| **Apply Filters**  
Common filters appear to the left and the right of search results. Can be customized in My NCBI. | • Narrow your search by language, publication date, full-text availability, and article type (clinical trial, review). |
| **Search Details**  
Box on the right side of the search results page shows exactly how your search strategy was interpreted by PubMed. | • Identify useful MeSH terms.  
• See what went wrong if your search results are not what you expected. |
| **Single Citation Matcher** link from main PubMed screen or go to:  
• Fill in the blanks with the pieces of information you have. |
| **Use the UW Libraries’ Guide to PubMed** | • [libguides.hsl.washington.edu/pubmed](http://libguides.hsl.washington.edu/pubmed) |

One-Time Tasks for Long-Term Benefit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Set up a My NCBI account**  
[libguides.hsl.washington.edu/myncbi](http://libguides.hsl.washington.edu/myncbi) | • See links to your institution’s full-text journal articles.  
• Set up email alerts.  
• Create collections of references.  
• Customize filters & site preferences  
• Use My Bibliography to manage your publications for NIH funding compliance. |
| **UW ONLY: Bookmark the proxy bookmarklet.**  
Then click on the saved UW proxy bookmark if you’re denied access to a UW-subscribed full-text article.  
[www.lib.washington.edu/help/connect.html](http://www.lib.washington.edu/help/connect.html) | • Using the proxy signals the publisher that you’re affiliated with UW. |
## Strategies for Advanced PubMed Searchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Only Have a Minute?**  
Search for a “dream title” to find one good reference. Then look for the “related citations” list to the right of the abstract. | • Get a quick list of about 100 references ranked by relevancy when you click on “See all.” |
| **Steps for Building a Good Search Strategy**  
1. Find 2 or 3 good references and use the MeSH terms they used.  
2. Build a strategy using MeSH terms along with individual words or phrases as needed.  
3. Apply filters such as “clinical trials,” “review,” or a date range. | • By starting with 2 or 3 good references, you can find more like them.  
• Using MeSH terms for key concepts will retrieve more relevant references.  
• Incrementally improve your search by adding MeSH terms, your own words, or by applying filters until you get a reasonable number of relevant references. |
| **Identify MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) terms**  
using the MeSH database or a relevant reference. | • Zero in on references where your topic is a significant focus of the article.  
• MeSH terms let you include several related terms under one umbrella term.  
• Combine two or more MeSH terms to narrow your search.  
• Note: The most recently added references may not yet be indexed with MeSH terms. |
| **Example:** *Fibroblast Growth Factors* [mesh]  
Finds references on FGFs in general, as well as specifically named FGFs, e.g., FGF-2, FGF-7. |  
| **Example:** *Tryptamines* [mesh]  
Finds references on a class of drugs, as well as specific drugs within that class, e.g., Sumatriptan. |  |
| **Use MeSH Subheadings if appropriate**  
**Example:**  
*Genome-Wide Association Study/ethics*[mesh] | • When you select a MeSH term, you can further limit your search to a particular aspect of that subject, such as “ethics,” “therapeutic use,” or “immunology.” |
| **Phrase searching**  
Enclose a phrase in quotation marks.  
**Example:** “single cell” | • Useful if there is no good MeSH term.  
• Also useful for locating very recent, unindexed references.  
• Only retrieves references where your exact phrase is used.  
• NOT comprehensive. Only works for selected frequently-occurring phrases. |
| **Advanced Search** mode for modifying, combining, or excluding past searches. Also offers a “fill-in-the-blank” search interface.  
**Example:** #5 NOT #3  
[if you looked at the results from search #3] | • Exclude references you’ve already reviewed.  
• Try different combinations and modifications of past searches.  
• Build a strategy using pull-down menus. |