Medline®: a guide

This handout gives information on using Medline (EBSCO®)
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Introduction to Medline

Medline:

- Is recognised as the best source for searching Biomedical Literature.
- Contains well over 12 million records from more than 5,600 journals.
- Covers the years 1966 to date.

Other databases you might use include CINAHL, PsycINFO, and AMED.

Accessing Medline

1. Go to the Library homepage [https://www.bradford.ac.uk/library/](https://www.bradford.ac.uk/library/).
2. Enter the word Medline in the Summon search box.
3. Click on the ‘Go’ button to do a search.

At the top of the search results page, click on the “title of the database” to link through. You may use either option:

- Search for the database, enter medline into the Summon search box
- MEDLINE - Webbiographic database of life sciences and biomedical information

At this point you will need to log in with your University of Bradford username and password if you are off-campus.

Basic Search or Advanced Search?

Medline has two modes of searching: Basic or Advanced Search.
Basic Search uses one search box. You can put in one term or a combination of terms in the same way as you might search the web. However, your results will be very hit-or-miss depending on your having keyed in the same words the authors of the articles have used.

We recommend using Advanced Search which is also the default setting.

You will need to define your search clearly and pick out your key concepts and think about the keywords that describe your key concepts. The best way to do this is to ask yourself a question e.g. what are the problems associated with smoking during pregnancy? Break down the question into keywords e.g. pregnancy / smoking.

Searching Medline

Medline uses descriptor terms or Medical Subject Headings (MESH). Each article on Medline is given Medical Subject Headings to define what the article is about. Searching using MESH should increase the number of relevant references you find. When you enter a keyword into the search box Medline will automatically 'map' your keyword to one, or several Medical Subject Headings related to your request.

Search for your first keyword

Enter your first keyword (e.g. pregnancy) in the search box and click on Search.

1. Medline will “map” the term you have used to a Medical Subject Heading.

2. Select the relevant MESH by ticking the box next to the term to select it.
3. If more than one is relevant select all the relevant headings by ticking the box next to each one to select.

4. Click **Search Database**.

**“Search as Keyword” option**

Sometimes the keyword you have entered does not ‘map’ to a relevant MESH.

In cases like this tick **‘Search as Keyword’**, which is the last option on the list. This will search for your term in the article title and abstract. This will give you some articles to start to look at.

Later you may find out what the relevant Medical Subject Heading is that you should use and then be able to repeat your search using the Heading.

**Search for your second keyword**

Now enter your second keyword (**smoking**) into the search box and click on the ‘Search’ button.

1. As happened with your first term, Medline will “map” what you have keyed in to its MESH and suggest several options.

2. Select the heading (**Smoking**) that is most relevant by ticking the box next to it.

3. Select any other relevant headings (for example the headings **Tobacco Smoking** and **Cigarette Smoking** may also be useful).

4. Click Search Database

![Diagram of search results with selected heading highlighted.]

**Search for your third keyword**

If your research question has a third concept you will need to do another search or searches for the keywords relating to your third concept.
What are Explode / Major Concept / Scope and Subheadings?

When you select a heading from the list of MESH you may be given the option to Explode or select the heading as a Major Concept.

**Explode**

Select the **Explode** option if you want to search to include all the headings below a main heading. For example; if you clicked on the heading itself, that is clicked on the heading **Smoking** you will see the other subject headings beneath it, these include Vaping, Tobacco Smoking, Cigarette Smoking, Cigar Smoking, Marijuana Smoking, Cocaine Smoking, Pipe Smoking, Water Pipe Smoking plus others. If you wanted to search for all these different types of smoking also then you could select the heading Smoking and then click the Explode box to explode and include all the other types of smoking within your search results.

If you are doing a systematic review of the literature you will need to investigate the Explode option for all headings where given.

**Major Concept**

This will retrieve details of articles where the main focus of the article relates to a particular subject heading, for example articles where 'smoking' has been allocated as a Major Concept. This is useful when you are searching on a topic with a very large number of published papers. **However, use with care, as it will eliminate papers that don’t have the heading as a Major Concept.** An article may still have relevance even if it doesn’t have the heading as a major concept. **Do not use this if doing a systematic review.**

**Scope**

This is a descriptive note about the meaning and application of the subject heading. This can be useful if you need clarification. Click on the scope icon to open the descriptor.
Subheadings

These relate to specific aspects of a heading. Use with care as you may eliminate useful articles if the subheading hasn’t been allocated. Use the Scope Note for a description of the subheading and its application.

Combining Searches

You will now have two, three or more separate searches.

There are two ways to “combine” the searches so that you have a final set of results.

To combine the searches you can use ‘Search with AND’ or ‘Search with OR’. They have very different functions.

- ‘Search with AND’ is used to bring two or more searches together into a final set of articles which have ALL the Subject Headings present. For example; in this case you would need to combine the search for (Pregnancy) with the search for (Smoking OR Tobacco Smoking OR Cigarette Smoking) using Search with AND in order to find articles which contain both of the key concepts.

- ‘Search with OR’ is used to retrieve articles containing ANY of the subject headings or keywords. For example; you may want to find a set of articles about education in relation to smoking during pregnancy. You may need to do an extra search for the word “education”, another search for “health education”, possibly another for “health promotion”. These two or three separate searches would then need to be combined using “Search with OR” to obtain one set of results relating to the “concept” of “education” bringing all the keywords used to describe this concept into one set of results.

(This “education” search could then be combined with the search relating to “pregnancy” and the search relating to “smoking” using Search with AND to get a final set of articles).

This is an advantage to using a database like Medline or CINAHL. Searches can be constructed in a more systematic way.

Medline keeps a list of all previous searches under Search History/Alerts. To combine searches click the box next to each search you wish to use, then click on either “Search with AND” or “Search with OR” as required.

NOTE: any number of searches can be combined. Simply tick the box next to the search to select it, then decide if they need to be combined with “AND” or “OR”. See below:
In this case there are 5 searches:

- S1 MESH search for Pregnancy
- S2 MESH search for Smoking, selected headings Smoking, Tobacco Smoking and Cigarette Smoking
- S3 MESH search for Education, selected headings Education, Health Education
- S4 MESH search for Health Promotion.
- S5 Combined search of S3 OR S4. A combination of either Health OR Health Education OR Health Promotion. Combined using Search with OR.

The final search would be to Combine S1, S2 and S5 using Search with AND.

Click on View Results or Scroll down the page to see the final set of results.

Refining a Search

1. Click on SHOW MORE (On the left of the screen under the date slider).
2. If you want to refine to recent references published after a certain date choose the date you want to go back to (e.g. 2008).
3. Select the most appropriate limits.
4. Click on Search to impose your limits.

Medline can limit your results by many parameters including date of publication, English language, to different kinds of research and to patient characteristics such as age and gender.

You will need to look at the refining options offered and select any that match your research criteria.
How to get to the Full-Text

1. Sometimes, as in the first article below, all you need to do is click on PDF Full Text to access the full text of the article.

2. Where full text is not offered click on the SFX icon next to the details of an article you are interested in. This will help you find out whether the article is available in the library.

3. SFX may provide you with a direct link to the Full Text version.
4. If the full text is not available online, you may have an option to Check for print holdings in University of Bradford Catalogue as the journal may be available in print.

5. If the article you want is not available either in print or online, SFX will say “Sorry, this article is not available for immediate download”. You could then search Google Scholar in case an “Open Access” copy is available on the internet. If not, the final option would be to order the article via Inter-Library Loans. More information on this service is available at https://www.bradford.ac.uk/library/find-out-about/inter-library-loans/

Viewing and Selecting References

1. To see more information about each article, click on the title and read the Abstract.

2. Select relevant references as you go along by clicking on the blue folder on the right of each result to add to the FOLDER. NOTE: the folder will clear when you leave the database unless you have signed in (see below).

3. When you have finished your selection, look for a Folder link at the top of the main screen and click on it. The references you have selected will have been stored here.

4. From your folder you can print, save, email or export to Endnote.

Setting Up and Using a Personal Account

1. Look for the Sign-in link at the top right of the Main Search Page.

2. At the bottom of the screen it says “Don’t have an account? Create one now” Click on the link and complete the form (you will be asked to create a username and password). You will need to include letters/numbers and symbols in your password. You will be creating these directly with EBSCOhost. REMEMBER what you have used!

3. As well as permanently saving articles you can also save searches so you can re-use them later. Look for the ‘Save Searches/Alerts’ option. Click on it, give your search a name, and click on the ‘Save’ button. If you opt for an ‘Alert’ and say how often you want auto-alerts (daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly) and choose to ‘Save’, the system will run your search for you automatically, and notify you by email of new references found.

4. Next time you want to retrieve the references stored in your folder or re-run the search, sign into your EBSCOhost account and click on ‘Folder’ at the top.

Help

If you have a question about the library, have a problem with passwords, need help finding some information or would like to be shown how to use a particular resource then staff will be happy to help you. Book an appointment with a member of Library staff via the Library homepage: https://bradford.libcal.com/appointments