

Video transcript: Search strategy / PICO

Hello, my name is Kirsten and I'm one of the Academic Librarian at GCU.

Welcome to this short video "Planning a structured literature search".

We'll cover where to search, selecting databases, identifying appropriate search terms and using the PICO framework to structure your search.

Once you have a topic it is useful to browse multiple sources including textbooks, journals and websites before you begin a more structured search. This will help you to identify relevant terminology and to understand how much research is available. It will also help you to generate ideas about how you might focus and refine the research topic.

To do this, you can use a search engine like the library's Discover search or Google Scholar. Like Discover, searching Google Scholar lets you search broadly for academic literature. It searches across academic publishers, professional societies, universities and other websites for articles, thesis, books and abstracts.

Keep in mind that Google Scholar is not limited to a particular subject area and searches across content from all academic subjects, not just health. This means it's likely to return a large number of results and as there isn't a contents list available for what Google Scholar is searching it's difficult to be certain that relevant titles are definitely covered.

There are a number of advantages to using subject specific databases to find scholarly articles on a topic. These include the ability to focus on a particular subject area and make use of high quality indexing to retrieve a manageable number of results. Databases also have advanced tools for sorting and filtering your results and allow you to save and retrieve your searches.

You can use your library subject guide to find out which databases are suitable to use.

So, for the purposes of demonstrating a structured approach to literature searching we are going to use this research question – for women who have experienced domestic violence, how effective are advocacy programmes as compared to routine treatments?

Search engines and subject databases can't cope with full sentences or long phrases so it's important to break down your topic into keywords or search terms.

For the topic we are using those are domestic violence; advocacy programmes and routine treatments. But because not all authors will use the same words we need to think about possible alternatives and the sorts of things we would want to consider would be things like words with similar meanings, abbreviations, alternate spellings, plurals and words with the same stem.

Your background reading, scoping searches and own personal knowledge will come in handy here.

Now we're ready to put together a search strategy. I'm going to use the PICO framework to structure my search and I'll be using a selection of possible search terms for demonstration purposes – the terms that I include here are not intended to be a comprehensive list.

First I'm going to list some search terms for "domestic violence" in the population column...and then advocacy program* and other related terms in the intervention column... and then some examples of routine treatments listed in the comparison column

You don't always have to search on every element of the PICO table, some research questions don't involve a comparison and in this particular search I'm not searching for an outcome.

Depending on your search terms and the database that you are using, you may need to use some search techniques to accommodate phrase searching, alternate spellings and truncated words.

Okay, now we need to use Boolean operators to combine our search terms. The search terms in each column will be combined using the OR operator to make our search as sensitive as possible.

The combination of each of these strings will produce a set of results - and finally we will combine these results using the AND operator to make our search specific and produce a final set of results.

The library can recommend texts to support your research. Chapter 2 of the text shown here provides excellent guidance around formulating your question

and relating it to the PICO framework while Chapter 5 covers all of the steps involved in converting your review question into a comprehensive search strategy.

You can also find out more about PICO and search techniques on the library's web pages.

As well as information about finding grey literature.

And help with all aspects of searching for information

Thank you for watching.