Selecting Databases for Your Search

Selecting several databases ensures that your search is comprehensive. A well-cited guide on how to conduct a systematic review in medical research suggests, at a minimum, a combination of Embase, MEDLINE, Web of Science, and Google Scholar.[1] Cochrane and Scopus are also common databases for biomedical systematic reviews.

- PubMed, which is free, is the most common database to use to search for biomedical and life sciences literature. PubMed will search for relevant words in the title and abstract but not in the full text. PubMed includes citations indexed in Medline, uploaded by journals, and archived in PubMed Central. The distinctions between PubMed, Medline, and PubMed Central are explained here.
- Embase is a subscription database maintained by Elsevier. It has comprehensive indexing and tagging of the biomedical literature.
- Web of Science is a subscription service run by Clarivate that indexes citations in several different science disciplines.
- Google Scholar allows the use of Google search techniques but restricts results to academic literature, including journal pages, PubMed, university pages, and pre-print archives.
- Cochrane contains many clinical trials, including some publications that are not indexed in PubMed. Cochrane can be searched without a subscription, but a subscription is necessary to download complete search results.
- Scopus is the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature. It includes scientific journals, books, and conference proceedings.
- Psychology databases
  - PsycINFO and CINAHL can be used “if the research question is related to the field of psychiatry, psychology and/or to nursing and allied health”. [1]
  - PsycNet can also be used to search for “social and behavioral science content”[2]
- Consider consulting with a librarian for further help with your search.

Searching Grey Literature

Finding Grey Literature

Collecting Metadata

Metadata collected should include identifying information, such as DOI or PubMed ID, URL, author, and year, as well as information necessary for screening, such as title and abstract. If you are not using AutoLit, a system for removing duplicates and indicating screening status (i.e. included, excluded, or unscreened), exclusion reasons (ex. not relevant to the review topic, preclinical), and collecting full texts should be implemented.

References

1. Muka T, Glisic M, Milic J, et al. A 24-step guide on how to design, conduct, and successfully publish a systematic review and meta-analysis in medical research. CKGE_TMP_i Eur J Epidemiol CKGE_TMP_i . 2020;35(1):49-60. doi:10.1007/s10654-019-00576-5