PubMed Searching Using Subject Headings (MeSH)

Although you can search PubMed using the search box on the main PubMed page, this is keyword searching and may give you a large number of results, many of which will not be relevant to your topic. Each article in PubMed is assigned subject headings from an index called Medical Subject Headings (MeSH). Using these subject headings gives better, more specific results. Similar to searching CINAHL or Medline, we use the Concept-by-Concept approach to conduct MeSH searches on PubMed, searching one concept at a time and then combining our searches and applying our limits. Follow these steps for effective PubMed MeSH searches:

1. Use the MeSH search screen (follow the link, or you can also find MeSH in the drop-down menu beside the search box on any PubMed page)

2. Enter your first concept
   a. If there is a match,  
      i. You may want to Restrict to MeSH Major Topic to ensure that this is a main subject for each article retrieved
   b. If you get no results, you will need to think of another term(s) that you can try instead

3. Enter your second concept
   a. If there is a match,  
      i. You may want to Restrict to MeSH Major Topic to ensure that this is a main subject for each article retrieved
   b. If you get no results, you will need to think of another term(s) that you can try instead
4. Now that you have 2 searches in your Search Builder, 

5. Once you have a set of results, you can begin to refine your results using the filters along the left-hand side of the screen (e.g. Article Types, Text Availability, Publication Dates, etc.)
   a. You can modify the filters that are available by using the Customize option, or Show additional filters

6. View your results

7. If you access PubMed through either the Conestoga Library website or the McMaster Health Sciences Library (for BScN or RPN to BScN students) website, you can select Full text from the Text availability filter, and if the full article is available in the Library collection, you will be linked to it – this increases the number of articles you can access when searching PubMed

8. You can track your search activity in one of the following ways:
   a. Look for Search Details and/or Recent Activity along the right-hand side of the results screen
   b. Select the Advanced option underneath the search box – this will show you a Search History

9. There are tutorials available on the McMaster Health Sciences Library website to help you learn to search PubMed, and improve your searches