Searching flowchart

Compose a research or clinical question

Keep in mind: 1) the patient, 2) the intervention/ exposure, and 3) the outcome.

Identify relevant sources to search

This can include databases like MEDLINE and Embase, or The Cochrane Library.

Define the search strategy

Break the question into concepts or elements that can be searched separately, and later combined. Define the content and filter searches.

Content searching
Use appropriate controlled vocabulary
Add text words and synonyms

Use the appropriate controlled vocabulary of the database you are searching. For example, in MEDLINE use MeSH (Medical Subject Headings). Use textwords and synonyms to search in non-indexed fields such as the title and abstract fields.

Determine Boolean Operators

Use AND to retrieve records which contain both terms, use OR to retrieve records which contain either term, and use NOT to eleminate records with certain terms.

Filter searching
Consider the use of filters and limitors

Filters can be added to retrieve specific search results. Some databases will allow limiting of searches to certain publication types (like RCTs), language, sex, age, etc.

Run the search and revise the strategy, if necessary

Consult a librarian for assistance or to validate the search strategy.

Critically appraise the results

Apply the evidence to practice