

# A Guide to Searching for Evidence-Based Information in the Health Sciences Literature Tool

A Handout for From Evidence to Action Participants

## What is a literature review?

A literature review provides an overview and a critical evaluation of an existing body of literature relating to a research topic or a research problem.

A literature review is an opportunity to analyze a body of literature and classify it by themes or categories (rather than simply discussing individual works one after another).

## What is the purpose of a literature review?

A literature review situates your topic in relation to previous research and illuminates a spot for your research. It accomplishes several goals:

- Provides background for your topic using previous research.
- Helps you become familiar with previous, relevant research.
- Evaluates the depth and breadth of the research in regards to your topic.
- Determines remaining questions or aspects of your topic in need of research.

Health professionals search the literature for evidence to support your clinical, program or policy decisions or to keep a current perspective within your field.

## How do I focus my research question?

- Map out your search terms and the relationship between them on paper, before putting them into a database or requesting a literature search from the Library.
- Thinking of the search terms is usually the most difficult part, and it is important that you give this careful thought.
- Break your search down into different concepts, then think of different ways of expressing each of these.
- Think of synonyms and alternative ways of saying the same thing.

## How do I gather evidence-based literature?

## 1. Request a Literature Search

<https://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/health/secure//literaturesearch.ssl.php>

- Let the Health Sciences Libraries professional staff do a database search for you.
- We will select and search the most appropriate databases, library catalogues and other Internet sources.
- Search results, usually consisting of a list of citations with abstracts, will be provided in print or electronic format.



## 2. Drop and Copy Service

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/health/media/dropcopyform.pdf>

- Select the citations that are of interest to you from your literature search and obtain the full document directly from the Libraries by faxing the Drop and Copy Request Form to the Neil John Maclean Library
- Use the form to request any copies of articles, book chapters, or reports that you find in bibliographies or that are recommended to you by colleagues.

If you want to gather information on your own try:

*For background books or reports on a topic:*

## University of Manitoba Library Catalogue

<http://umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/health>

- Click on **Library Catalogue** heading on the upper left corner of the page (in the blue column).
- The catalogue can be searched by keywords, title, and author
- A help guide to searching the Catalogue is available at:  
<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/health/help/index.html#bison>

Once you have located a book of interest, place a request for the book by using the

## Drop and Copy Form

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/health/media/dropcopyform.pdf>

### Google [www.google.ca](http://www.google.ca)

- Google is very helpful in identifying relevant grey literature such as reports by associations or government bodies, conference proceedings, practice guidelines, and protocols
- A query with terms in quotes finds pages containing the exact quoted phrase. For example: "[lou gehrig's disease](#)"
- Instead of the layperson's term, use the medical term. For example: instead of "lou gehrig's disease" try "[amyotrophic lateral sclerosis](#)"
- Use "differential diagnosis" or "practice guideline" or "protocol" to get to medical sites instead of commercial or consumer health sites. For example: [differential diagnosis stroke](#)
- Specify synonyms or alternative forms of a medical terminology (e.g. practice guidelines) with an uppercase **OR**. For example: ([guideline OR protocol](#) ) [stroke OR "ischemic attack"](#)  
*Note:* Use parenthesis to keep the like terms together. Google assumes that you want to combine the two sets of concepts together with **AND**
- Find definitions for medical words, phrases, and acronyms from the Web by using **define**: For example: [define:ischemic](#)
- Search a web site that you know has reliable information by including the name of site in your search. For example: [medlineplus and stroke](#)  
For example: [emedicine stroke](#)
- Try **Google Scholar**, (<http://proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/login?url=http://scholar.google.com>) a new feature of Google. This will limit your search results to articles published in scholarly journals. Using the above URL should also help you link to articles that are electronically available through the UM Health Science Libraries. You will need to enter your Library ID and PIN. If you use Google Scholar please review this **WARNING** about results retrieved on health science searches.

*To browse health-related research journals:*

### Electronic Journal Holdings at UM

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/health/resources/elecjrn.html>

Listing available by **Subject** and **A to Z**.

Represents all of the electronic journal titles in health to which the UM Libraries subscribe (over 4000)

To access the any of the UM electronic journals click on:



Enter your Library ID and PIN

### Directory of Open Access Journals


<http://www.doaj.org/>

- These journals can be accessed freely by anyone on the Internet
- More limited set of journals but helpful if you do not have a UM Library card.

*To find articles by subjects or keywords in research journals on health-related topics:*

### Electronic Databases

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/health/databases/index.html>

- Databases help you to search the contents of journal articles and conference papers by subject, author, title, and keyword.
- The Library does not create these databases, it only subscribes to them
- Most databases just include information on the author, title, source, and pages of a particular article, book chapter, or conference proceeding. They frequently contain an abstract that summarizes the article.
- All University of Manitoba databases include the UM links icon: 
- Clicking on this icon will open a new screen with information on the publisher of the journal and a link to full-text online journal article. Clicking on the publishers name will link you to the full-text of the article.

- If the article is not available electronically choose **Document Delivery** in the screen that opens.
- Under **Location** choose WRHA/PCH. You will be prompted to complete any necessary information to make your request. The article will be faxed to you by the Library.

The following are two specific databases of value for seeking articles for those doing health-related research

#### PUBMED

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/health/databases/medline.html>

- PubMed is a very large interdisciplinary health sciences database produced by the National Library of Medicine.
- It contains references to articles from medicine, dentistry, allied health, health administration, veterinary sciences and maintains significant coverage of the nursing literature.
- Use the link provided above and enter your Library ID and PIN to access full text articles and make document delivery requests using:



- Keyword searches work well for clinical queries (e.g. breast neoplasms treatment)
- Try **Special Queries** on the left side in the tool bar:

**Clinical Queries** is a search interface to find citations in the areas of

- **Clinical Study Categories:** Find citations corresponding to a specific clinical study category.

- **Systematic Reviews:** Find citations for systematic reviews, meta-analyses, reviews of clinical trials, evidence-based medicine, consensus development conferences, and guidelines

**Health Services Research Queries** is a search interface to find citations relating to health care quality or to health care costs

#### SCOPUS

<http://umanitoba.ca/libraries/online/proxy.php?http://www.scopus.com>

- Scopus is a multi-disciplinary abstract that indexes key medicine, science, and social science journals.
- Scopus is integrated with and can simultaneously search Scirus, which covers science-related web pages and institutional repositories.
- Scopus is able to track cited references. You can use it to search for subsequently published papers that cite an original research paper. Useful for harvesting additional articles of relevance.
- Use the link provided above and enter your Library ID and PIN to access full-text articles and make document delivery requests using:



#### What are the next steps?

- If you are trying to get a general overview of a topic, then read the articles and evaluate them for their appropriateness to your question or problem. Helpful tools:

#### Website:

Beginners Guide to Research Studies

<http://www.cih-irsc.gc.ca/e/34192.html>

**Book:**

Girden, Ellen R. **Evaluating research articles from start to finish.** Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, c2001.

**Journal Article:**

McNally, R. & Alborz, A. Developing methods for systematic reviewing in health services delivery and organisation: an example from a review of access to health care for people with learning disabilities. II. **Evaluation of the literature—a practical guide.** *Health Information and Libraries Journal* 2004, 21, 182–93

- If you need a critical appraisal or systematic review of the evidence you have gathered - this is a *complex* and *time-consuming* process. We recommend that you consider contracting someone with skills in this area or consulting a content or methodological expert.