Getting Started with Searching

Define your topic as a question
What is the effectiveness of antibiotic treatment for respiratory tract infections in children?

Use the PICO format
Patient = children with respiratory tract infections
Intervention = antibiotics
Comparison = none
Outcome = identify best treatment

Choose the most appropriate database
Go to the CAHS Library website
http://
Click Find Articles to see available databases

Note: consider other resources on the Library website, such as e-books, clinical guidelines, evidence-based resources

Break your search question into main concepts
eg. search 1 = respiratory tract infections, search 2 = antibiotics

Use subject headings whenever possible
Subject headings will provide a more precise search strategy and reduce the number of irrelevant results

Combine concepts using AND
eg. search 1 AND search 2 respiratory tract infections AND antibiotics
This retrieves articles with both search terms

Combine concepts using OR
eg. search 3 OR search 4 measles vaccine OR rubella vaccine
This retrieves articles with either or both search terms
Use limits to refine your search
eg. English language, publication year, age group (eg. child)

Save your search
Consider saving your search strategy so you can run your search later or create an alert that sends search results to your mailbox each time a new article on your topic is added to the database

Find full text articles
Click Get It! to see if an article is available online

Isn’t Google quicker?
Google and Google Scholar only search the words you enter, while databases allow you to use subject headings and limits to focus your search and get more relevant results. A Google search may seem quicker but a database search is usually more efficient

Need help? Contact us on (08) 6456 0407 or by email CAHS.MedicalLibrary@health.wa.gov.au