Using CINAHL Subject Headings

CINAHL Headings are specialized subject headings assigned to the articles in the CINAHL database. These headings describe the content of the article, and if used for searching, help you find the most specific, targeted results. Rather than finding articles that may only mention your search term, you can find articles that are focused on your topic.

Locate CINAHL

Go to the New Jersey State Library main page: http://www.njstatelib.org/

Select the Research Tools tab and then select Databases.

Use the By Title alphabetical drop down box and select the letter “C.”

Scroll down and select the link for CINAHL Complete.

[Note: Anyone may use CINAHL in person at the New Jersey State Library. Authorized users may use the database from outside the library building with a valid New Jersey State Library card. Authorized users are current New Jersey State employees and Thomas Edison State College staff members and students. Use the barcode number on the library card to access the database.]

Once in the database, you will probably be on the Basic Search screen.

Tip: If you choose the Advanced Search option before starting your search for headings, you will have more limit options later on.

Searching with CINAHL Headings

Select the CINAHL Headings tab at the top of the screen.
You can then browse for headings that match your search concept(s). For example, pertussis:

In this case, the CINAHL Heading for Pertussis is “Whooping Cough.”

Click on the Subject Heading name to see more information about this term - including broader and narrower terms (if applicable). This is called the “Tree View” since it shows a hierarchical “tree” of terms.
To select the term for searching, check the box to the left of the heading. A blue column will open providing options to add subheadings. **Note:** Subheadings further define and focus your term to particular aspect(s) of the main search term. For example, *Diagnosis* of Whooping Cough.

You can also choose the **Explode** or **Major Concept** options for your search.

Choosing **Explode** will include any *narrower terms* in your search – these are any terms *indented* under your heading of choice.

Choosing **Major Concept** will ensure that this subject heading describes the *main focus* of the article.

Once you have made your heading and subheading selections, click on **Search Database** on the right side of the screen.
You can now add other terms or select limits.

Combining Headings

To add another CINAHL Heading and combine it with the first, click on the CINAHL Headings tab at the top of the page and proceed as you did for the first heading. For example, this was a search for the CINAHL Heading, “Disease Outbreaks”.
After doing the search, you can go into the Search History and combine your 2 searches.

Clear the search, click on Search History, and combine your searches with AND:
For additional help, see short tutorials on using CINAHL Complete:

Questions about using CINAHL? Contact:
Martha Sullivan, Reference Librarian, Health Information
New Jersey State Library
609-278-2640 x103
msullivan@njstatelib.org