Searching CINAHL
The Importance of Using Subject Headings

CINAHL Coverage

CINAHL provides indexing and abstracting for over 3,000 current nursing and allied health journals and other publications. It contains over 1,000,000 records dating back to 1981. Subjects covered include biomedicine, health sciences librarianship, alternative/complementary medicine, consumer health and seventeen allied health disciplines. CINAHL also covers selected health care books, nursing dissertations, conference proceedings, and standards of practice.

Getting Started from Smith Library Homepage

From the library home page, http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/smith, scroll down and click on Databases. Scroll down for the link to CINAHL. Off campus users will be asked to sign in using their last name and the last four digits of the University ID or “A number”.

Once you have logged in you are presented with the CINAHL main search page. Help is available on every page at the top right corner. You can also sign into or set up a Personal Account that can be used to save user preferences, search results, search strategies and alerts.
**Searching with Subject Headings**

Subject headings are specific terms that are used to index articles. They provide a consistent way to find articles that are about the same topic but where the author may have used different terms to describe that topic.

Every article indexed in CINAHL is read by a subject specialist and is indexed using appropriate subject headings that reflect the entire content of the article. The indexer selects terms from an annually updated list of subject headings. This list of terms is an integral part of the CINAHL database.

In most cases, using subject headings is the best way to search this database.

> It is important to remember that the text of most of the articles indexed in CINAHL is not searchable, so the subject headings that are assigned act as a surrogate for the complete article.

This outlines the difference between Subject Headings and Keywords.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Subject Headings</th>
<th>Keyword</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific terms</strong> that are used to index articles. They provide a consistent way to find articles that are about the same topic but where the author may use different terms to describe that topic.</td>
<td>An author selected word used in a book or article to describe a topic in the book or article. For example these are all keywords an author may use to describe the same topic: -bedsore -pressure sore -bed sore -pressure ulcer -decubitus ulcer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For example</strong> Cancer, Tumors and Neoplasms are all indexed under one Subject Heading: Neoplasms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do they relate to each other?</strong></td>
<td>In a database, the same Subject Heading is assigned to articles that may use different keywords for the same topic.</td>
<td>Different authors may use different Keywords when writing about the same subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do they find?</strong></td>
<td>A Subject Heading search will locate articles on the same topic regardless of the terms used by the authors.</td>
<td>A Keyword search will pick up all articles that have that word in the text regardless of whether it is a topic or not. It will also miss articles that use alternate terms for the same topic.</td>
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</table>
### How are they used?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Heading</th>
<th>Keyword</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Search a database</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Index articles contained in a database</td>
<td>or</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Standardize terminology</td>
<td>search for a <strong>Subject Heading</strong> that is then used to search the database.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### When are they used?

| When a topic is **established** and **clearly defined** in the database | When a topic is **new** or **rare** or crosses concepts. |

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**CINAHL Headings**

CINAHL offers Basic, Advanced and Publications search capabilities. The default at UMDNJ is set to "Advanced Search". CINAHL has the added benefit of a controlled vocabulary thesaurus, or **CINAHL Headings**. The **Headings** allow you to check whether you are using the correct terminology in your search, to locate a preferred term, and make the most of the database.

There are two points of entry to **CINAHL Headings**. You can use either.

The following screen shows the results list when we search for the terms "angina" in the CINAHL Headings.
At this point, you can choose to search the database using one of the terms (e.g. *Angina Pectoris*) by clicking on the box beside it and then clicking “Search Database”.

This will enter the Search term into the Find Box. Click “Search” to begin the search on the term.

If you want to find out more about a particular term or want to limit the term using a subheading before searching then click the hyperlinked heading to bring you to the next screen.

*CINAHL subject heading* terms are arranged in a hierarchy or “tree structure” that permits searching at various levels of detail from the most general level to more narrow levels to find the most precise terms. The further a term is indented to the right, the more specific the term.
The headings can be **exploded** to retrieve all references indexed to that term as well as all references indexed to any narrower term(s). You can add more than one heading to a search by using **Boolean logic** to link the terms.

Once you have constructed your search using whichever **Subject Heading and Subheadings** you choose, click on "**Search**" to conduct the search. You will get a results list from where you can review, print, email or save the documents that you find most useful. Subheadings limit a broader term to a specific focus. For example, clicking on "prevention & control" would limit retrieval to articles about that specific aspect of angina pectoris.

Use "**Search History**" to revise a search, (such as adding extra limiters such as year of publication), combine a number of searches to make a very precise search. You can save your search into a personal account for future use.
Obtaining Full Text

Each article in CINAHL contains an icon that will lead you to full text of an article or provide you with information to obtain full text through the Library Inter Library Loan System.

Saving a Search Strategy / Alerts

To save searches, you must first register for a free account. This can be done at the top of the page by clicking on "Sign into My EbscoHost".

Select the search you want to save and click on Save Searches / Alerts link and follow the prompts.
For any further help you can call the Reference Desk at (973) 972-4358.