PsycInfo Script (Session 1, 2020)

Hi – I’m going to show you how to do a search in the database PsycInfo and get the most out of the special functionality available via the OVID interface.

PsycInfo indexes articles from a wide range of journals which are all approved by the American Psychological Association. So this means you should get high quality results whenever you use this database.

Before we start, we should think about our topic, identify the main concepts and come up with several synonyms for each concept. Our topic is “Interventions to improve social skills for school aged children with Autism”.

**Interventions to improve writing of students aged 5-12 years with learning problems.** You are interested in the quality of the content and style of writing, rather than handwriting.

You can arrange the concepts and synonyms in a table like this – with a column for each concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing skills</th>
<th>School aged children</th>
<th>Learning problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing style</td>
<td>Children aged 5-12</td>
<td>Learning disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing composition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We haven’t included a concept for “interventions” here. We expect that many articles will provide various interventions but we don’t want to anticipate what they will be – at this stage at least.

So, let’s find PsycINFO via Multisearch ....

Now we are in the database, let’s start by ensuring the “Map term to subject headings” box is ticked.

![Map Term to Subject Heading](image)

This allows us to tap into the subject thesaurus of the database. Instead of just searching for items with the words or phrases we enter, it helps locate the relevant headings which might be used to index the articles in the database and subsequently helps us retrieve better results.

So let’s try entering “Writing skills” and hit “Search” and see what comes up.
If what we typed in has an exact match, it will just list that heading, plus give us the option to search the same thing as a keyword. Selecting the Keyword option will retrieve instances of that word or phrase from the title, abstract and other fields in the record.

We will just select the subject heading now though, and then select “Continue”.

Repeat this process for each of the synonyms you have identified until your search starts to look like this:

Several of the words/phrases you enter will not have an exact match, such as “Writing Style and Narrative writing” – however you can incorporate these into a one line search using Boolean operators and sometimes using proximity operators. In the OVID interface the proximity operator is ADJ3 – the number indicates how many words between the words you enter. For example:

(writing or written) adj2 (Style or compos* or Communicat* or Skill* or express* or narrative*).ab,ti.

This line represents all the items in the first column in a compact and efficient manner.

Adj2 means that the words writing and skill (for example) need to occur between two words of each other and ti,ab. Means that the words can only occur within the title and/or the abstract. The asterisk at the end of Skill (and Social) is a truncation symbol and will retrieve all words which start with Skill but may end in something more – such as skill, skilling, skilled, skills, or Social, Socially, etc.

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Once we have done this, we are ready to combine all our terms for the first concept.

Combine your synonymous lines with OR – select the box against each line and select the OR. (Alternatively, you can use this syntax: or/1-5 ) This will give you another line which includes all the results combined.

“OR” is a Boolean operator which allows us to retrieve all of the results together in one place. It expands our search. (ie bigger numbers)

“AND” is the other Boolean operator which is often used. It means that to retrieve items we must have elements of both or all sets selected. It narrows our search. (ie smaller numbers)

Now we are ready to enter our second concept which is “learning problems” – we can enter all the different synonyms we can think of or discover... such as learning disorders, Learning disabilities, Dyslexia... these can be narrower terms – ie examples of specific learning disorders.

Let’s enter ‘Learning disorders’ in the search space. This retrieves a heading for Learning Disorders – select and click on “Continue”.

You can do the same for Learning Disabilities and Dyslexia. We can therefore do something similar as for the first concept to capture other words and articles which haven’t yet been indexed. For example:

And then combine the terms entered for our second concept with OR
In this database there is a very good age limit, so we don’t really need to search for “School age children” per se. We are now therefore ready to combine our first two concepts together with AND.

We can either select the two combined sets and click “Combine with AND” or enter this:

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and/4,10
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Now we can limit our search so far to a specific age group. To find this, select “Additional Limits” (located toward the bottom of the blue panel on the screen):

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Keyword  Author  Title  Journal
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This opens a new page with “Limits Search” at the top...

Scroll down to a box which says “Age Groups” and select “School Age <age 6 to 12>”

Then scroll back up and select “Limit a Search”

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Once you see how many results you end up with, you may need to consider other possible limits:

- Peer Reviewed Journal;
- English Language;
- Publication year (especially if there have been significant changes to treatment over time – but consider if this is helpful);
At this stage, it’s a good time to check whether the results look relevant. Have you retrieved more or fewer results than you might have expected for the topic?

If you ended up with too few, you could consider going back and choosing fewer limits. If you have too many, you could add another concept (like a particular intervention, for example) or more limits, … but check the relevance before you add too many more things to limit. While looking at the results, consider whether you should change, delete or add further terms to your search strategy. You might identify further useful terms within the titles or abstracts which you could add to further improve your strategy and get slightly better results. You might also find too many irrelevant results – try to identify why they are there – it may or may not be possible to eliminate them without eliminating good results.

Select individual articles – or the whole list – to export to your favourite Bibliographic Referencing software. Tick the boxes next to each item (or “All”). You can export up to 1000 records to EndNote at one time.

Obtain the full text by selecting “Find it at MQ”. This will take you to multisearch to find where we might have access to the item.

Please contact your research librarian if you need additional assistance or have further questions.