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Searching PubMed – top tips

5 top tips to make your searching of PubMed more efficient.

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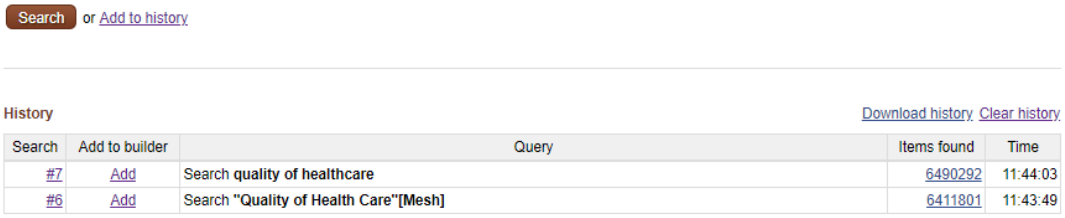
1 Too many hits? How to narrow down the searsch

1.1 Use MeSH only

- Why?

There will be significant reduction in the number of hits if you search using MeSH only: eg



Rather than looking for the keyword text in title or abstract, Pubmed will only look for papers that have been tagged as being about the right subject.

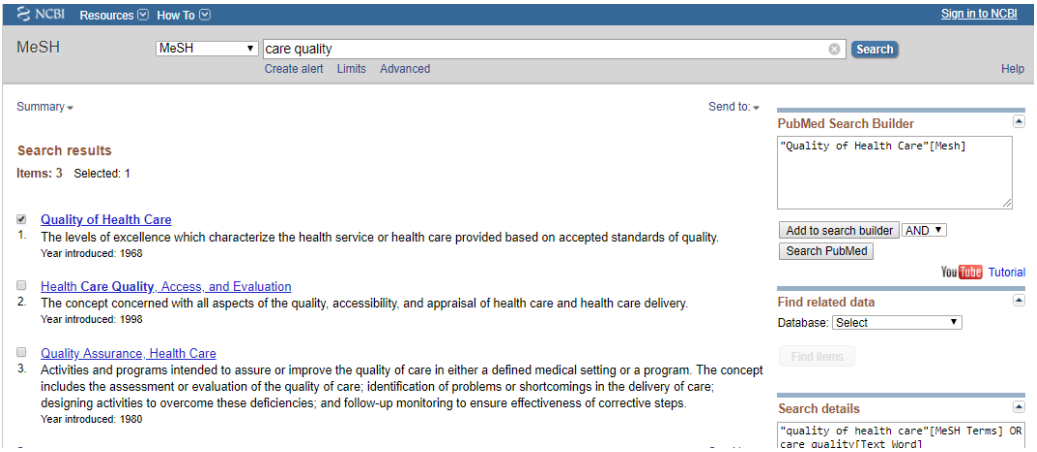
You may only need to do this with one part of your search strategy.

- Why not?

There's always a downside – newer papers haven't had MeSH added yet, so you might miss most recent publications on the topic.

- How?

Type your keyword in the pubmed search box, then select MeSH from the dropdown menu.



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Hopefully there'll be a match, but you might need to adjust your language to get a good fit.

Check the definition, tick the box, and "add to search builder".

Finally "search pubmed" which will add the MeSH to the advanced search to combine with other terms.

1.2 Still too many? Use MeSH Major headings

- Why?

Major headings are MeSH terms that are the main theme or topic of the paper.

- Why not?

There are only 2 or 3 Major MeSH per paper, so you might miss relevant papers. You can see the significant different in numbers of hits.

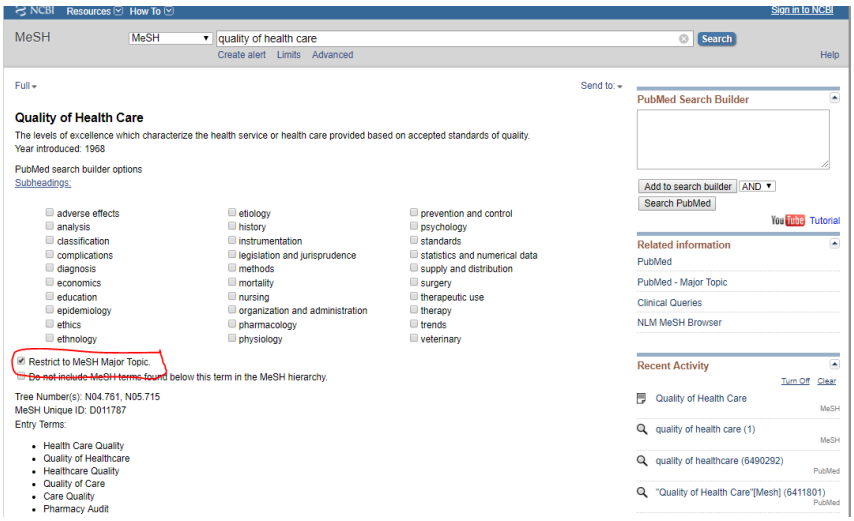
History

Download history Clear history

Search	Add to builder	Query	Items found	Time
#9	Add	Search "Quality of Health Care"[Majr]	821261	12:06:56
#7	Add	Search quality of healthcare	6490292	11:44:03
#6	Add	Search "Quality of Health Care"[Mesh]	6411801	11:43:49

- How?

Search for your MeSH as above, and click on the term when you find it.
The detail for the individual MeSH will give the option to "restrict to MeSH Major Topic".
Select this, "add to search builder", and "search Pubmed".



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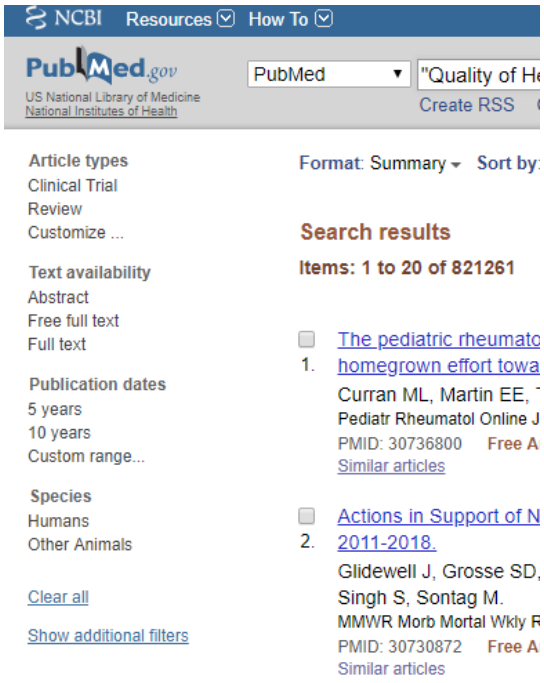
1.3 Narrow by publication year, or research methodology



- Why?

The research methodology might be a key way of prioritising your reading. Why not start by reading the reviews on a topic?

- Why not?

Often limiting by publication year won't help much because rates of publication are increasing exponentially, so only including the last 5 or 10 years often doesn't reduce the number of hits

The "human" limit is only useful if you want to distinguish between animal and human studies – the human keyword isn't generally added to care quality papers, so limiting to only those papers where it *has* been added will skew the results.

- How?

Use the options down the left-hand menu of PubMed to narrow by various criteria:

Click "customise", add the options you want and "show". Click those option to apply them to your search.

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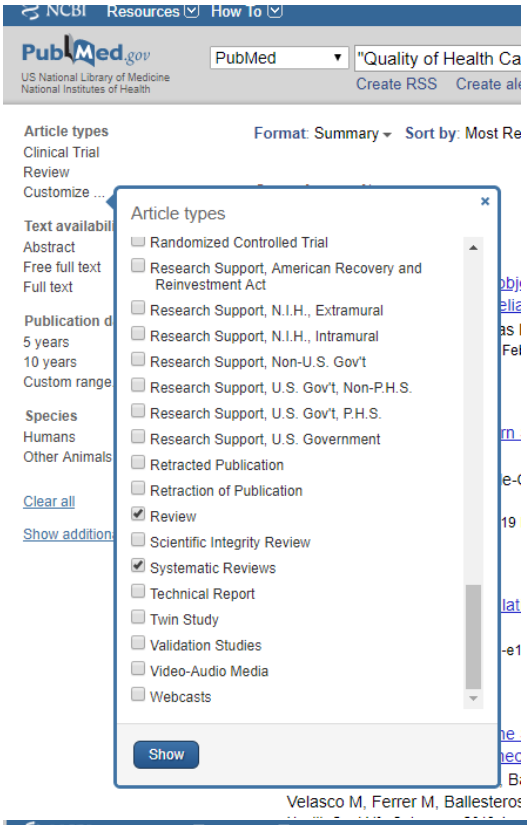

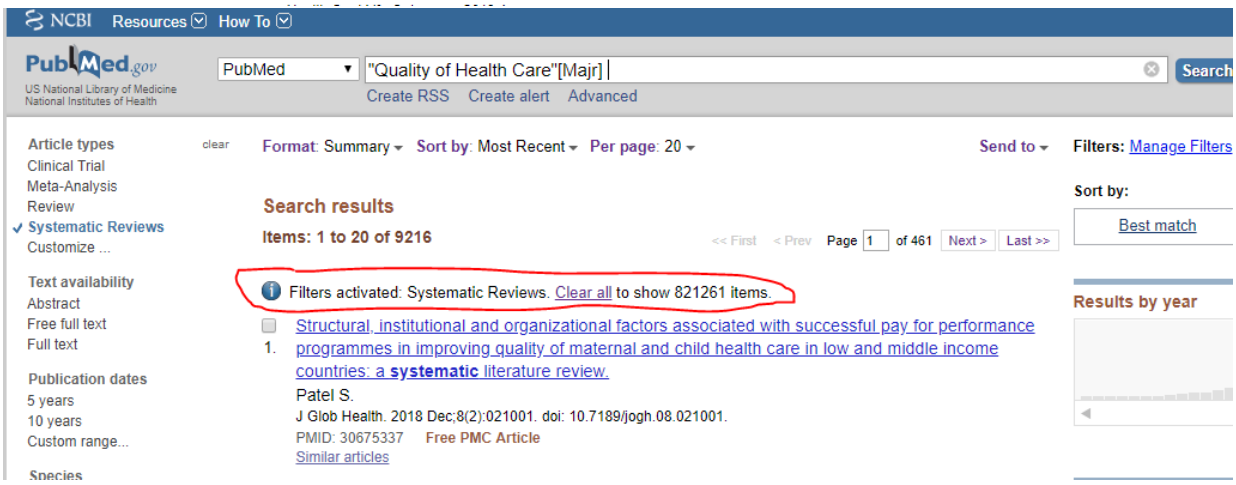

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2 Too few hits? How to broaden your search

- How?

Consider some combination of the following:

- adding additional synonyms
  e.g. if your topic is *cancer*, try including *cancer OR neoplasm OR tumour OR tumor*

- reducing the number of search "blocks"
  e.g. if yours is a 4 or 5 part question, consider how you could reduce it to a 3 part question

  what is the *influence* of *weekend staffing* on *patient satisfaction* with *maternity* care in the *UK* ?
  try only searching for
  what is the influence of *weekend staffing* on *patient satisfaction* with *maternity* care in the UK ?

- consider a different database
  Maybe Pubmed just does not hold the information you need.

3 Setting up alerts

- Why?

Get efficient at receiving new papers on your topic, by your favourite author, from key journals – set up an alert.

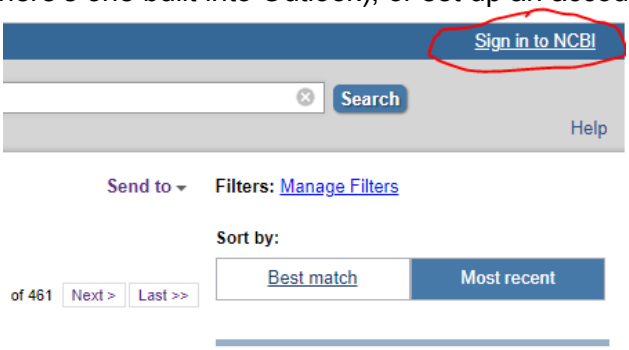
- Why not?

If you don't find them useful, and/or when the need for them ends, just turn off via MyNCBI.

- How?

You'll need to either use an RSS reader (there's one built into Outlook), or set up an account with NCBI

Create your search, then click "create alert"



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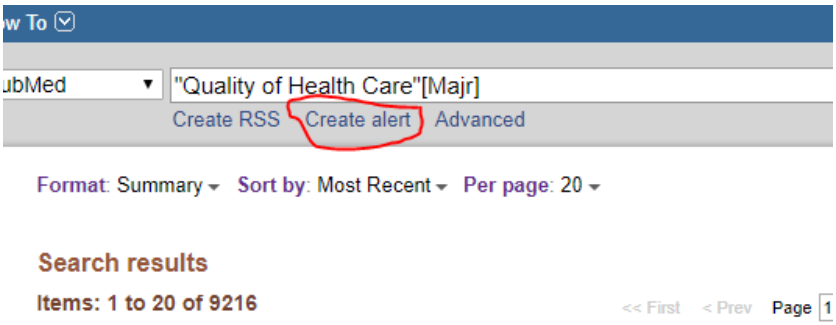
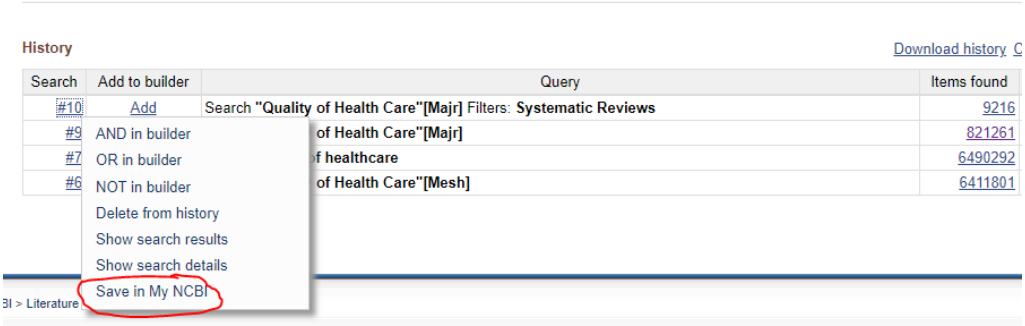


There's an option to create an alert in advanced search as well.



Sign in, and then adjust the settings as you prefer.

4 Get the full text: Use Cambridge PubMed

http://tinyurl.com/campubmed has an extra button for every paper, so you can check if Cambridge provides access that is different to the publisher access suggested by Pubmed

5 Ask the training team

Always happy to help – just email librarytraining@medschl.cam.ac.uk

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