The InterTASC Information Specialists' Sub-Group Search Filter Resource (SFR)

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https://sites.google.com/a/york.ac.uk/issg-search-filters-resource/home

What is the Search Filter Resource?

The ISSG Search Filter Resource (SFR) brings together search filters so that librarians and information specialists engaged in searching can easily identify relevant filters to incorporate into their search strategies. This can save time and effort designing searches and lead to more efficient searches.

What are search filters?

Search filters are collections of search terms designed to retrieve selections of records from bibliographic databases and other sources. While some filters are designed to retrieve records of specific study designs such as randomised controlled trials or systematic reviews, others aim to retrieve records relating to other features or topics such as the age or gender of research study participants.

Search filters may be designed to be sensitive (to find as many relevant records as possible), precise (to find as few irrelevant records as possible) or balanced between sensitivity and precision (finding a large proportion of relevant records but with as few irrelevant records as possible).

The design of search filters should ideally be approached as a research exercise and the resulting filters should be presented with data on their performance in finding relevant records so that we are able to judge their suitability for use.

When would you use a search filter?

Search filters are usually combined with the results of a subject search using the AND operator (see Figure 1). Note that in Figure 1, for brevity, a single search term has been used to indicate the search strategy for breast cancer. In actual use, the full search strategy for breast cancer would be listed here and the RCT filter would be appended at the end.

Ovid MEDLINE(R) <1946 to July Week 1 2016>
1 Breast Cancer/ (242730)
2 randomized controlled trial.pt. (423952)
3 controlled clinical trial.pt. (91212)
4 randomized.ab. (320587)
5 placebo.ab. (162292)
6 clinical trials as topic.sh. (178175)
7 randomly.ab. (225589)
8 trial.ti. (140236)
9 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 (967384)
10 exp animals/ not humans.sh. (4276333)
11 9 not 10 (885408)
12 1 and 11 (18892)

Figure 1.

When used in this way, a well-chosen search filter should reduce the number of irrelevant records retrieved. Consequently, the number of records that need to be assessed for relevance to the search question should be reduced. Search filters are not yet available for all study types or all databases or all database interfaces.

What is the coverage of the Search Filter Resource?

The content of the ISSG SFR is grouped by study design or focus. It includes, for example, sections on filters for adverse events, diagnostic accuracy studies, qualitative research and RCTs. It currently lists over 170 documents describing search filters or search filter methodology. This makes it the first resource to search when trying to identify a search filter to incorporate into a search strategy.

How is the Search Filter Resource produced?

Articles reporting search filters are identified by searching MEDLINE, Embase and CINAHL, on a weekly basis and by scanning e-mail discussion lists. Search results are assessed by two members of the editorial team (JG and KW) and new search filters that are identified are added to the relevant section of the ISSG SFR website.

Can you contribute?

Yes!

If you know of search filters that are not already on the website please send details to us at: julie.glanville@york.ac.uk

We also welcome critical appraisals of filters (https://sites.google.com/a/york.ac.uk/issg-search-filters-resource/issg-search-filter-checklist-proforma)

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References