Developing a Search Strategy

Here is the Step -by - Step way to create a search strategy:

Step 1: Create a Research Question

Research Question Example: "Do Elderly people living in seniors or nursing homes struggle with Mental Health issues?"

Step 2: Find the Major Concepts in your Research Question

Which are: Elderly, mental health, and nursing home

These terms are the concepts you will use to develop your search strategy.

Step 3: Find Synonyms for the Main Concepts

For Example: Elderly and Seniors are two different words that are used to describe a similar concept (human beings who are older than the age of 65).

- If you only entered the term "elderly" into a search of a database, then you would miss all the articles that deal with "Seniors".
- These terms: may be described by a variety of terms, so you should think of all possible synonyms for them.

Tip: Create a chart with all of the possible terms used to describe the main concepts of your research question:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elderly</th>
<th>Mental health</th>
<th>Nursing Homes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Retirement home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged</td>
<td>Mental disorder</td>
<td>Retirement facility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 4: Test out the Terms

- When all of these terms are entered, and the publication date is refined to search for articles that were published between 2010 – 2019 this article is available:

**Assisted Living Facility Administrator and Direct Care Staff Views of Resident Mental Health Concerns and Staff Training Needs.**

Authors: Delon, Emily¹
Daijano, Louise M.¹
McAlister, Courtney²


Document Type: Article

**Subject Terms:**
- Congregate housing
- Elder care
- Mental health of older people
- Long-term care of older people
- Social work with older people
- Gerontology
- Adult care facilities
- Long-term care facilities
- Mentally ill older people
- Mental health personnel
- Nursing home employees
- Health facility employee training

Author-Supplied Keywords:
- long-term care
- mental health
- mental illness
- quantitative

**Abstract:**

This community needs assessment surveyed 21 administrators and 75 direct care staff at 9 larger and 12 smaller assisted living facilities (ALFs) regarding perceptions of resident mental health concerns, direct care staff capacity to work with residents with mental illness, and direct care staff training needs. Group differences in these perceptions were also examined. Both administrators and direct care staff indicated that direct care staff would benefit from mental health-related training, and direct care staff perceived themselves as being more comfortable working with residents with mental illness than administrators perceived them to be. Implications for gerontological social work are discussed. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]

- This article does not answer the research question because after reading the abstract, the authors focus on how staff perceive and deal with mental health...
in long term care facilities. However, take note of the journal it came from as there may be more helpful articles in this journal as well as the words in blue or subject terms. There are a few terms that are relevant to the research question such as:

- Congregate housing
- Mental health of older people
- Adult care facilities
- By clicking on these blue terms, it will bring you to articles directly related to this topic

**Step 5: Weed Terms**

- After you have completed your list of synonyms and have done some basic research on a database or google to weed terms that do not quite match your topic.

*For Example:*

- You discovered a “retirement home” is where elderly people mostly care for themselves and live an independent life with nurses on hand if they need them compared to “long term care” which is when nurses need to care for the elderly 24/7 and the residents require more assistance for their daily activities.

- With this new information, you have decided that you are more interested in the elderly who have mental illnesses while living in retirement homes

- When searching, you also discover that some terms were not effective, so you removed them from your list, and you find more terms that are useful that can be added to the list. For example:
  - *Seniors* was bringing material for seniors in high school
  - *Mental Disorder* and *Mental Condition* were not helpful terms

- Your synonym list will now look like the following:
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<td>Mental disorder</td>
<td>Retirement facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Mental condition</td>
<td>Assisted living facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geriatric</td>
<td>Mental balance</td>
<td>Old people's home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological condition</td>
<td>Long-term care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health of older people</td>
<td>Adult care facilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- As you complete more research you may discover that terms like “joy” and “happiness” are terms that may bring more results because that is how researchers have classified material rather than mental health

**Step 5: Test out Search Operators!**

- If you go to “Academic Search Premier” (or another database found on the Holland College Library page) you want to search for multiple terms in one search, rather than searching them separately.

**AND:** Narrows the search by looking for all the specific concepts

- *Example:* Elderly AND “mental illness”
  - Your results list will include only those items where both subjects are present.

**OR:** Broadens the search by looking for the synonyms of the concepts

- *Example:* Elderly OR “Older People”
  - All results will contain either, or both of these terms within them.

**NOT:** Asks the database to search for one concept and exclude another
Step 6: Create the Search String!

- Now we can consider the synonyms and combine them using the OR operator:

  - "Mental health" OR “Mental Balance”
  - Elderly OR Older OR Aged
  - “Retirement Home” OR “Retirement Facility” OR “Assisted Living Facility”

- Now we can combine all the search term synonyms with the OR operator into one search statement using the AND operator to put everything together:

  Example:
  "Mental health" “Mental Balance” AND "older people" OR Elderly OR aged AND ("Retirement home" OR "Retirement facility" OR "Assisted living facility")

*Tip:* Notice the parentheses around the terms that we have OR'd. This is a process called NESTING.

- Nesting tells database that the terms within the parentheses are the same concept. When the database reads this search strategy it will see:
  - (Concept 1) and (Concept 2) and (Concept 3)

*Tip:* Any time your search query includes a concept that includes two words like: Mental Health
• Quotation marks tells database that the terms, “Mental Health”, within the quotation marks is **one term** rather than Financial **AND** Analyst

• Even if you don’t put the **AND** operator between two terms the database **automatically puts it in there**.

**Step 7: Now you can test out your strategy on a database!**

**Note:**

• Don’t get discouraged if your research question changes or if articles change your mind on a subject and need to shift your research idea!

• It’s better to be flexible in the early stages of research. Most importantly **get help** if you are struggling, library staff are more then willing to help!