Checklist for Completed Searches

When you have done all of your searches it’s best to check to make sure that they are as complete as possible, and that the searches for all databases are very similar - in fact all of the words and phrases that you have searched in fields outside the databases’ indexing languages (MeSH, Emtree etc.) should be the same in each search if possible.

- Have you checked all of the indexing terms you have used from MeSH, PsycINFO Thesaurus etc. to see the database’s definition, and the date that the term was added? Many new terms have been added to MeSH over recent years
  e.g. mindfulness[mh] was added in 2014, and therefore will not search the database prior to that date – you’ll have to rely on title and abstract searching for earlier material.

- Have you searched indexing terms (MeSH, PsycINFO Thesaurus etc.) in other fields? Searching cognitive therapy as a MeSH will explode the term, but won’t look for the phrase in other fields – all indexing terms need to be searched in other fields, such as titles and abstracts
  e.g. neoplasms[mh] OR neoplasm*[tiab]
  The only exception to this would be where terms are inverted – e.g. nurses, community health[mh], in which case you would search community health nurs*[tiab]

- Have you looked extensively for synonyms and related words and phrases which may appear in titles and abstracts – have you included PubMed’s Entry terms and Embase’s Synonyms in your list?
  Have you then tested each of them before including them in your search? I usually do a title search for words or phrases I want to use, just to make sure they work the way I intended.

- Have you allowed for British and American spelling in words and phrases to be searched outside the indexing languages (MeSH, Emtree etc.)?
  e.g. tumor*[tiab] OR tumour*[tiab]
  counselor*[tiab] OR counsellor*[tiab]

- Have you allowed for both singular and plural forms of words and phrases to be searched outside the indexing languages (MeSH, Emtree etc.)?
  e.g. woman*[tiab] OR women*[tiab]
  patient*[tiab]

- Are your lists of words and phrases to be searched outside the indexing languages (MeSH, Emtree etc.) the same across all databases searched – in other words are your searches as similar as possible?

- Have you applied limits to your searches? In PubMed language and date limits can be used safely. But age ranges, species limits, sex limits, and some publication types, e.g. Clinical trial, will restrict results to Medline only, and will eliminate all new unindexed articles.

- If you have excluded certain indexing terms, or terms in titles and abstracts, could this have compromised your search?
  e.g. excluding child[mh] in PubMed will exclude articles which deal with BOTH adults and children.