Searching in CINAHL (EBSCO)

CINAHL is a database that contains nursing and allied health literature. CINAHL is searched using a combination of subject headings (called **CINAHL headings**) and keywords. It is strongly recommended that you search other databases in addition to CINAHL when conducting research.

Access CINAHL through the Medicine for Students subject guide or the Medicine and Public Health database list.

Keywords and subject headings

Literature in CINAHL can be found using both keywords and subject headings. **Keywords** find a term in an article record (not the full text), while **subject headings** find articles about a topic. It is recommended to use both keywords and subject headings when searching in CINAHL.

Keywords	Subject headings
Find an exact phrase in the title, abstract, etc. of an article	Find articles about a concept
Not arranged in any order	Arranged in a hierarchy, with broad terms at the top and specific terms at the bottom. Articles are given the most relevant subject headings possible
Need to search for all variations of a term (e.g. plurals, spelling variations) and alternate terms to make a search comprehensive	Automatically include variations of terms
Searching multiple keywords can be time consuming	Quick and easy to use
Good for finding emerging research about concepts that have not been assigned subject headings yet	Aren't always up to date; may not be discipline-specific
Use natural language	Use medical/health jargon

Using CINAHL

CINAHL searches are conducted line-by-line, with each concept searched separately and then combined with Boolean operators (AND and OR). The search history appears underneath the search box. Articles found in a search appear at the bottom of the page.

The following searches aim to find an article comparing two tools used to diagnose amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) - diffusion tensor imaging and magnetic resonance spectroscopy. These terms should be searched separately to ensure you get the more relevant results.
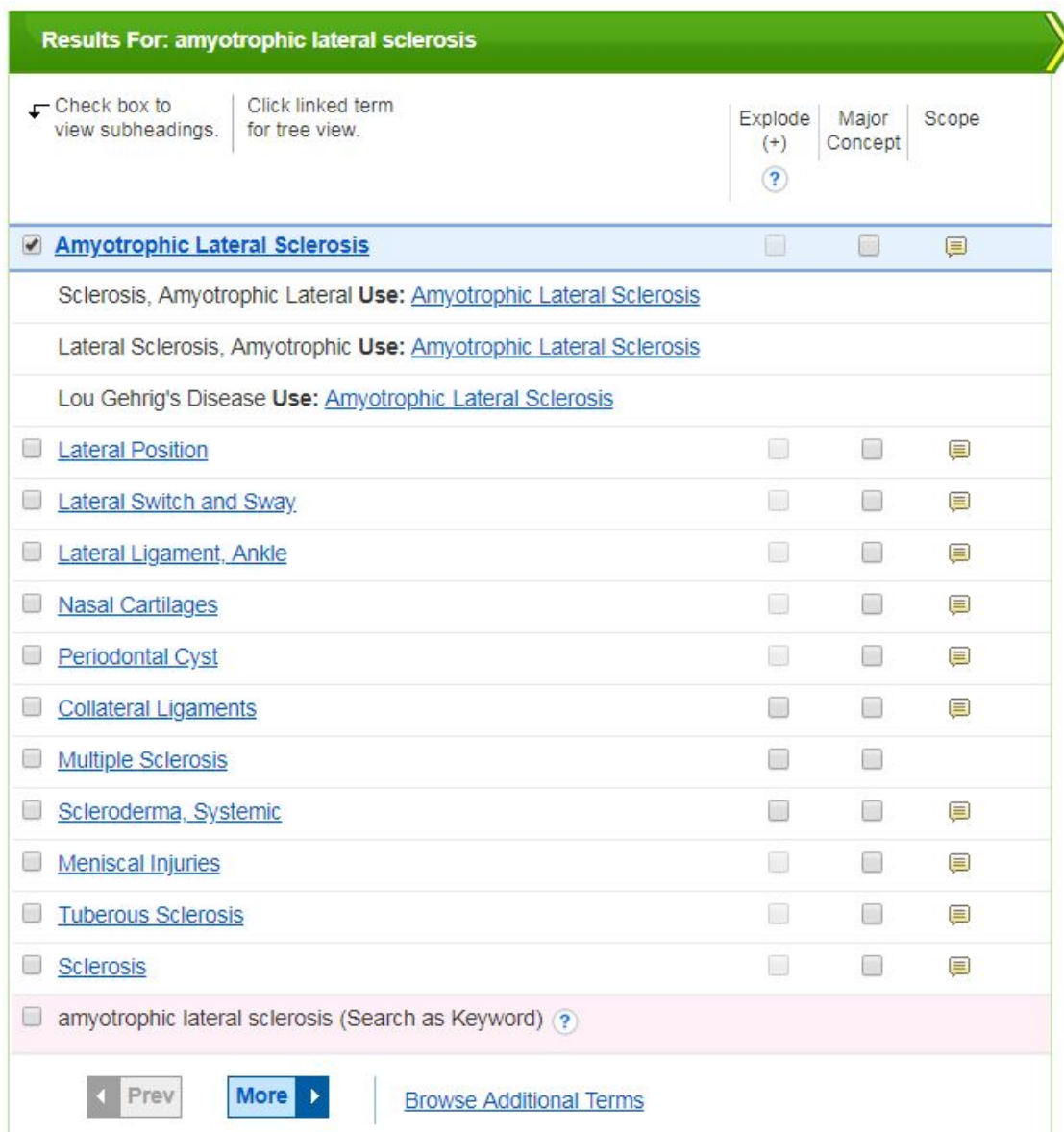
To start searching in CINAHL, type your first keyword into the search box. Make sure the **'Suggest Subject Terms'** box is checked - this will tell the database to automatically search for a matching subject heading to use.

The next page contains a list of subject headings. CINAHL recommends headings that closest match your search terms (such as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis in the example below) as well as terms commonly used with your search terms (Collateral Ligaments., Meniscal Injuries, and Multiple Sclerosis). In the example below, 'amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Search as Keyword)' is the keyword.

Before selecting a subject heading, click the 'Scope' icon ( ). This will give you the definition of the term to ensure you're using it correctly. Don't use a term if it's not relevant - use another one instead.

Click on the subject heading to see where it falls in the hierarchy. This will show you if there's a more specific term you could be using instead.

If CINAHL does not recommend any relevant subject headings, or if it recommends you a subject heading from one of your other search concepts, don't select any.

Click the checkbox next to the subject heading you want to use. A box will appear showing the 'subheadings' assigned to the subject heading you have selected - these show all the different ways the subject heading can be used. An abbreviated example can be seen below.

Subheadings for: Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

☑ **Include All Subheadings**
Or select one or more subheadings to restrict your search

☐ **Blood/BL**
☐ **Cerebrospinal Fluid/CF**
☐ **Complications/CO**
☐ **Diagnosis/DI**
☐ **Epidemiology/EP**
☐ **Etiology/ET**
☐ **Immunology/IM**
☐ **Legislation And Jurisprudence/LJ**
☐ **Mortality/MO**
☐ **Nursing/NU**
☐ **Pathology/PA**
☐ **Physiopathology/PP**
☐ **Prevention And Control/PC**
☐ **Prognosis/PR**
☐ **Risk Factors/RF**
☐ **Symptoms/SS**
☐ **Therapy/TH**
☐ **Ultrasonography/US**

Used For:
ALS; Lateral Sclerosis, Amyotrophic; Lou Gehrig Disease; Lou Gehrig's Disease; Sclerosis, Amyotrophic Lateral

While some articles are assigned specific subheadings, it's best to include all of them to ensure that you don't exclude any potentially relevant results. To do this, click **'Include All Subheadings'**. The heading you have selected will appear in a box on the right. Click **'Search Database'** to select the heading and move to the next step.
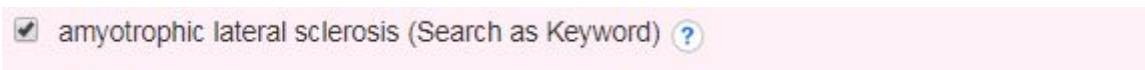

This will add the subject heading to your search history.

To add the keyword 'amyotrophic lateral sclerosis' to your search, search for it again. Instead of selecting the subject heading, click the box next to 'amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Search as Keyword)' and click **'Search Database'**.

The search history below contains both a subject heading (MH "Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis") and a keyword ("amyotrophic lateral sclerosis").

Search for all possible synonyms for each concept, then check the boxes next to them.

Click '**Search with OR'** to search for all the terms at once. This will create the following line:

Repeat this process for all of your search concepts, then combine each OR line with AND. Below is the completed search history for this question. Lines 6, 9, and 13 are combinations of each concept. Line 14 searches these combinations to find all articles that include a search term from each concept.

If you have a large amount of results, go to the refinement bar at the bottom of the page and click **'Show More'.** This appears in each section of the refinement bar.

Select the appropriate limits from the menu to refine your results.

The table below contains the advanced search syntax that can be incorporated into a CINAHL search to improve its accuracy and increase the number of results.

Note: in this guide, *n* stands for a number, not the letter n. To use these operators, replace the *n* with the number of letters or numbers you'd like in between terms.

Syntax	Symbol	Example	Function
Truncation	*	depress*	Finds 'alternate endings' to a word
Truncation within words	*	sul*ur	Replaces multiple characters within a word
Mandated wildcard	?	wom?n	Replaces 1 letter
Optional wildcard	#	p#ediatric	Replaces 0-1 letters
Nesting	(...)	behavio?r AND (depression OR anxiety)	Group similar terms in a search
Proximity - near	N*n*	disturb* N3 sleep	Find a word within a specified limit or another word (in any order)
Proximity - within	W*n*	disturb* W3 sleep	Find a word within a specified limit of another word in the order specified
Phrase search	" "	"quality of life"	Search for phrases as a single concept

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