



(<http://www.rcog.org.uk>)

[Home](#) > [Our profession](#) > [Research services](#) > Literature searching

Effective literature searching

This page will help you take the first steps in conducting a literature search. It includes links to many useful resources, and guidance on how to get the most out of them. For more information contact library@rcog.org.uk [1].

Please note that a few of the links on this page are to pages restricted to RCOG Fellows, Members and Trainees. **Please sign in to ensure that you can access all the material available to you.**

[1. Defining your question](#) [2]

[2. Choosing suitable resources](#) [3]

[3. Useful resources](#) [4]

[4. Medline and bibliographic databases](#) [5]

[5. Recording your search activity and results](#) [6]

[6. Using information ethically and legally](#) [7]

1. Defining your question

All searches should begin with a structured or clinical question. See the Centre of Evidence Based Medicine's website for more information about [asking focused questions](#) [8].

2. Choosing suitable resources

Your choice of information resource will depend on your reason for searching and the kind of question you are trying to answer.

To identify research topics consider:

- the research recommendations in RCOG [green-top guidelines](#) [9] or [study groups](#) [10]
- Implications for research in the conclusions of systematic reviews, details of completed trials in the CENTRAL database, or protocols for forthcoming systematic reviews in the [Cochrane Library](#) [11]
- [PROSPERO](#) [12]: International prospective register of systematic reviews
- registers of [current trials](#) [13]
- Lists of projects already funded by bodies such as [Wellbeing of Women](#) [14] and the [Wellcome Trust](#)

For background information consider:

- online library catalogues e.g. [RCOG](#) [16]
- [Medline](#) [17] for articles on epidemiology or recent review articles
- [Statistical](#) [18] resources

For a systematic or literature review consider:

- [Databases](#) [5] such as those listed below
- [EThOS](#) [19] - the British Library's electronic thesis database
- Hand searching, i.e. following up on reference lists and conference abstracts

3. Useful resources

General resources

All of the resources we are going to mention are available on the internet, so some introductory resources that might be useful are:

- [BBC webwise](#) [20] - an introduction to the workings of the web
- [Internet for Medicine](#) [21] - a free tutorial

General search engines

When used appropriately, these can be a shortcut to detailed, reliable information. Some examples are:

- [Google](#) [22]. Improve your search with tips from the [Help pages](#) [23]
- [Bing](#) [24] - [help pages](#) [25]
- [Yahoo](#) [26] - [Help pages](#) [27]

Appraising sites:

Remember to assess any website you find carefully. Useful criteria to bear in mind are given in the

- Health on the Net Foundation [code of conduct](#) [28] for medical and health and Websites

Medical search engines, gateways and portals

Use these to go quickly to reliable sources of medical information. They include a much smaller number of resources, but each resource has been carefully chosen for its relevance.

- [TRIP](#) [29] (Turning research into practice)
- [Evidence Search: Health and Social Care](#) [30]
- [Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research](#) [31] (GFMER) See in particular the [databases and links](#) [32] section, for access to databases, full text journals, guidelines and images.

Guidelines

Guidelines can be found through many of the sites listed above, such as [TRIP](#) [29] and [GFMER](#) [33], as well as

- on organisations websites e.g. [NICE](#) [34]
- in databases such as [Medline](#) [17], if published as journal articles (e.g. the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists Committee Opinions)
- [National Guideline Clearinghouse](#) [35] which despite the name includes international sources

Ongoing clinical trials

Most databases concentrate on published literature, but some resources can help to identify work that is still ongoing:

- [ClinicalTrials.gov](#) [36]
- [Current Controlled Trials](#) [37]
- [UK Clinical Research Network Study Portfolio](#) [38]
- [MRC Clinical Trials Unit](#) [39]

Statistics - see a range of O&G related resources [here](#) [18]

4. Medline and bibliographic databases

Traditional bibliographic resources still provide the most effective means of finding medical literature. Widely available biomedical databases relevant to O&G are listed here, and availability through the RCOG website indicated by "**".

N.B. Other links in this list provide brief descriptions of the content of the database, but DO NOT allow you to search the databases. Contact your university, [health](#) [40], or professional library or [NHS users](#) [41] can register to access these databases. The [Wellcome Library](#) [42] and [British Library](#) [43] provide access to some databases to members of the public, free on registration.

- [Medline/Pubmed](#) [17] *
- [Embase](#) [44]
- [PsycINFO](#) [45] - Behavioral sciences and mental health
- [CINAHL](#) [46] - Nursing and Allied Health
- [British Nursing Index](#) [47]
- [Health Management Information Consortium \(HMIC\)](#) [48]
- [Maternity & Infant Care](#) [49] *

For an ongoing research project, you can store a search, and [automatically receive details of new articles](#) [50] that match your search terms. [50]

5. Recording your search activity and results

As you undertake your research, you will need to record and organise details of the publications you find. You should also record details of which databases you have searched and when, alongside details of your search strategies. This will allow you to update a search without having to repeat it in its entirety. Lots of IT systems are available to help you manage information, for example:

- the Workspace area in OVID (provides access to [Medline](#) [17], [Maternity and Infant Care](#) [49], [Cochrane Library](#) [11], full text [ebooks](#) [51] and [journals](#) [52] to RCOG Fellows, Members and Trainees)

- [Reference Manager](#) [53]
- [Mendeley](#) [54]

Standard reference formats

When writing up your research for publication, you might refer to:

- Information about standard styles including Vancouver, Harvard etc can be found on many websites, for example [Staffordshire University Information Services](#) [55] or the [BMA Library](#) [56]
- [Instructions to authors](#) [57]

6. Using information ethically and legally

Copyright

Copyright applies to all forms of intellectual output: books, journals, photographs, films, musical works, computer programmes, databases and so on.

Various licences exist to facilitate corporate or educational re-use of copyright material. For example, a university may hold a licence to enable the creation of repositories of key texts for online learning. However, before you reproduce another person's material, whether this is for an educational presentation or for publication, be sure that you have a legitimate right to do so.

On occasion, a copyright holder may use a copyright statement or something similar to explain how and when a work **may** be reproduced. Other copyright holders (for example [Wellcome Images](#) [58]) make their work available for personal, academic teaching or study. "[Creative Commons](#) [59]" licences are also becoming a popular way of supporting the legal reuse of material.

27 Sussex Place, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RG, UK | Tel: +44 (0)20 7772 6200 / Fax: +44 (0)20 7723 0575

- Registered Charity No. 213280
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists © 2013

Source URL: <http://www.rcog.org.uk/our-profession/research-services/Effective-literature-searching>