

Searching using OVID

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1. What is Ovid?

Ovid is an interface that allows you to access bibliographic databases. Bibliographic databases contain details of millions of journal articles, published in thousands of journal titles. Most are not located when using keyword searches in Google.

The articles in the databases vary in their quality and reliability. Many are primary research and may not have been evaluated beyond some basic checks required for publication. Critical appraisal is not covered here, although online checklists to appraise articles such as CASP (www.casp-uk.net) are available.

NICE used to have 9 healthcare-focused databases available through one interface, known as **HDAS** (Healthcare Databases Advanced Search). This was decommissioned in March 2022. The interface we use now is **Ovid**. This covers:

- **Medline** and **EMBASE** which cover medical sciences
- **AMED** and **Emcare**, allied health and complimentary medicine
- **HMIC** covers health business and management
- **Social Policy and Practice**

Together they provide an **index** to the published healthcare literature, with abstracts often provided and links to the full text where available.

Ovid allows you to search databases individually. Also, to name and store search-strategies, view and save detailed results, and export your strategy/results as a Word, PDF and RIS document.

2. Do I need to plan my search?

Yes. Carrying out a comprehensive and effective search on databases using Ovid is different to using a portal or search engine like Google.

Planning your search will help you to form an **answerable question**, identify the **key concepts** and develop **appropriate search terms** to describe these.

3. What is PICO?

PICO is a model that can help construct a focused question by breaking down the question into key concepts. You do not have to have something written in every box.

P	patient/problem/population	Who are the patients/population? What is the problem?
I	intervention	What is being done to the patient/population? What are they

	exposed to? What is the intervention?
C comparison	What do we compare the intervention with?
O outcome	What happens? Is the outcome measurable? Are there themes to identify?

Example 1: Aspirin has been shown to be best at preventing further myocardial infarction in patients and you want to know if this is still the case.

P patient/problem/population	Myocardial infarction
I intervention	Aspirin
C comparison	Anti-platelet aggregators
O outcome	Secondary prevention

Answerable question: In patients who have had a myocardial infarction, is aspirin still more effective than other anti-platelet aggregators in preventing further MIs?

Example 2: Continuous Positive Airway Pressure or CPAP Vs. standard care in severe bronchiolitis in children.

P patient/problem/population	Children with acute bronchiolitis
I intervention	Continuous Positive Airway Pressure/CPAP
C comparison	Standard treatment
O outcome	Avoid invasive procedure, better oxygenation

Answerable question: In children with acute bronchiolitis does CPAP reduce the need for invasive procedures?

4. Why do I need to look for synonyms?

The subjects you are searching for may be described differently in different place. Perhaps they are spelt differently or are described with acronyms. Look for as many appropriate alternative terms for each keyword as you can. For example:

- Physiotherapy is sometimes called physical therapy
- Teenagers can be teens, adolescents, youth, young people, young adults
- Cancer can be tumours, tumors, carcinoma

Perhaps you've already found a few papers, which will suggest alternative terminology or spellings for your keywords, or 'natural language' terms

P Patient/Population	I Intervention	C Comparison	O Outcome
asthma OR respiratory OR copd OR chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	holding chambers OR spacers	nebulizers OR nebulisers	quality of life OR QOL
	AND	AND	AND

Not all scenarios or questions exactly fit the **PICO** model. However, it is always useful to break your question down into its component key concepts, even if you don't use the full **PICO** formula.

5. How do I access the Ovid interface?

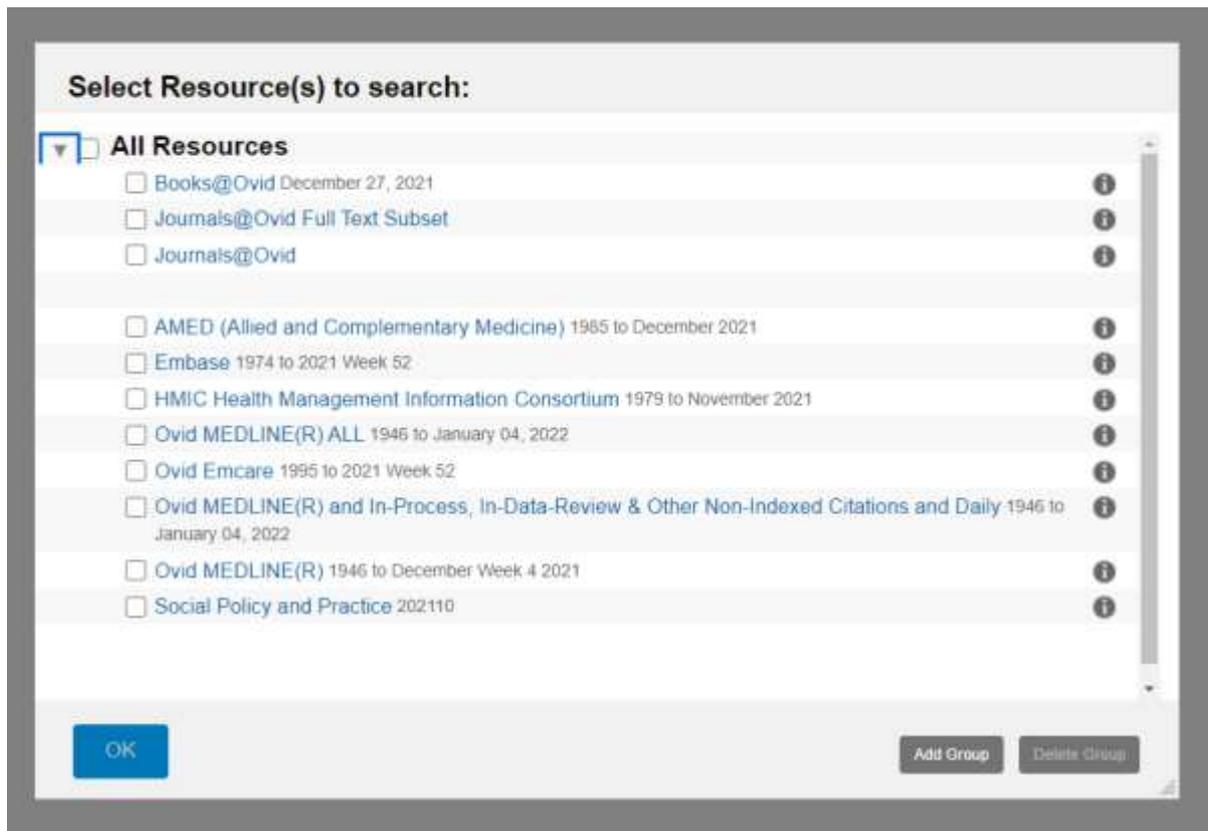
Ovid can be reached via the [Journals and Databases](#) section or directly:

<https://ovidsp.dc1.ovid.com/ovid-a/ovidweb.cgi>

Log in via the **Open Athens link**:

You will be asked to choose your institution: Choose **NHS in England**.

You will see a list of resources available to use. Tick the box next to the database you wish to search, and click on OK:



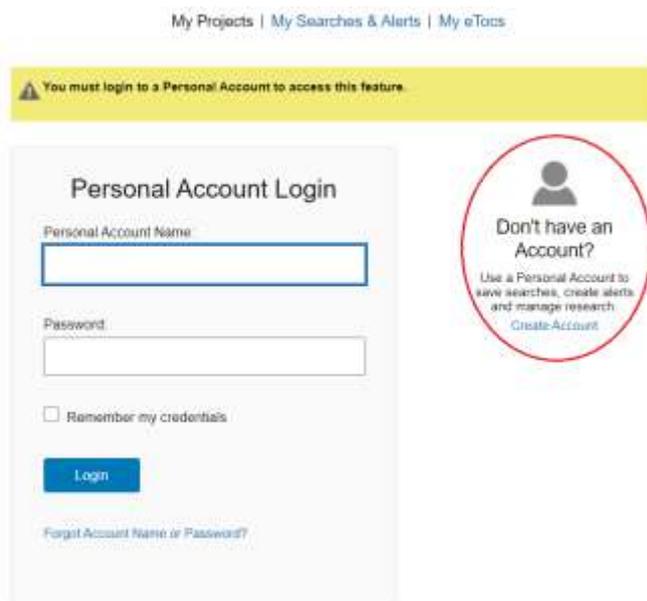
6. How do I set up an account with Ovid?

Do this before you start searching, so you can save your work! You will need to set up a personal account with Ovid in order to save your searches, alerts and any other projects.

Go to the **My Workspace** tab at the top of the screen:



You will be asked if you have an account, and you will see a **Create Account** link.

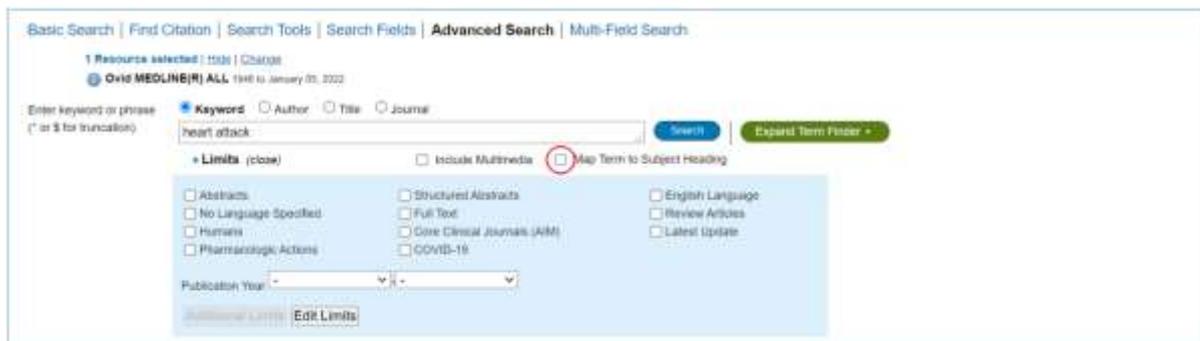


7. How do I start a search using natural language terms and phrases?

Start by adding your natural language search terms to the Ovid search box. A natural language term is a word or phrase that you would use to describe something (remember the PICO exercise that you have done).

You do not need to use quotation marks in Ovid when you are searching for a phrase. Ovid automatically searches for your terms as a phrase.

Untick the **Map term to subject heading** box for now.



By default, Ovid will search for your terms as “multi-purpose” or mp. This means it is searching within a range of fields, specific to each database.

Database	What fields does multi-purpose (mp.) cover?
Medline	title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms
Embase	title, abstract, heading word, drug trade name, original title, device manufacturer, drug manufacturer, device trade name, keyword heading word, floating subheading word, candidate term word
Amed	abstract, heading words, title

Social Policy and Practice	abstract, title, publication type, heading word, accession number
HMIC Health Management Consortium	title, other title, abstract, heading words
Emcare	title, abstract, heading word, drug trade name, original title, device manufacturer, drug manufacturer, device trade name, keyword heading word

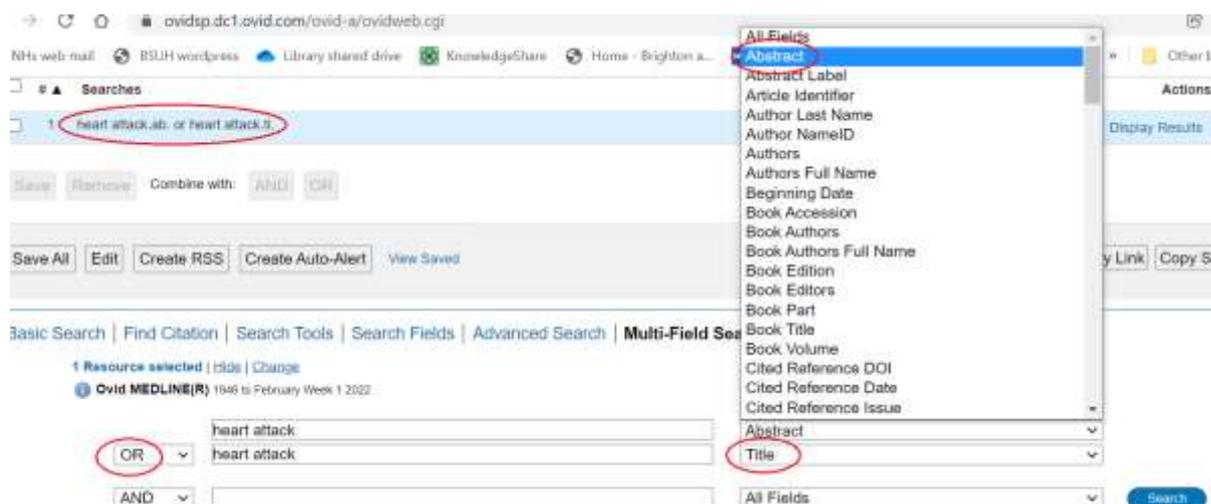
8. How can I do a Title and Abstract search if the Multi-Purpose search gives me too many results?

If the mp. field gives you too many results, you may want to narrow it down by searching only in title and abstract instead.

You can do this by clicking on the **Multi-Field Search**.



Type in the search term and choose which field you would like to search in from the drop-down list: **Abstract**. Type the search term in the second box and choose **Title** from the drop-down list. Combine the two terms with **OR** and press search.



9. How do I save my search?

You will need to have a personal account with Ovid in order to save your search (see step 1 if you have not done this).

Click on **Save All**:

The screenshot shows the Ovid search interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Search, Journals, Books, Multimedia, My Workspace, and What's New. Below the tabs is a search history table with columns for Searches, Results, Type, Actions, and Annotations. Two search entries are visible: '1 heart attack.mp. [mp=title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms]' with 284 results, and '2 heart attack.ab. and heart.atpck.3.' with 340 results. At the bottom of the search history section, there are buttons for 'Save All', 'Edit', 'Create RSS', 'Create Auto-Alert', and 'View Saved'. The 'Save All' button is circled in red.

You will be asked to name your search and save as **Project type: Permanent**.

The screenshot shows a dialog box titled 'Save Your Search or Create an Alert'. It has a 'Cancel' button and a 'Save' button. The 'Search name' field contains '2022-06-01 heart attack Medline'. The 'Type' dropdown menu is set to 'Permanent'. There is a 'Comment' field with the text 'Add a description, you can change it later.' and an 'Optional' label.

Tip: Ovid lists your saved searches in alphabetical order, which can make it difficult to find your most recent search. If you date your search, it makes it a lot easier to find. If you're doing lots of searches, start with the year. It is also useful to add the name of the database you are searching.

Ovid does NOT autosave your work. So make sure you save your search before you log off.

If you have logged out, and want to go back to a search you have saved, click on **My Workspace** on the log in page:

The screenshot shows the Ovid search interface with the 'My Workspace' tab highlighted in red. The search history table is visible, but the search results are not displayed. The 'Save All' button is circled in red.

Tick the search you would like to work on and press **Run**:



10. How do I use wildcards to search and why would I use them?

You can put the wildcard * at the end of your search term to search all words that start with those letters. (This is also called truncation.) For example, **depress*** will find depress, depressed, depressive, depressing and depression. It's a big time saver, so you don't have to write each of these terms out individually.

You can specify the maximum number of characters you want to search for after the wildcard. For example, **therap*4** will find therapy and therapist but not therapeutic.

The optional wildcard ? can be used within or at the end of a search term to substitute for one or no characters. This wild card is useful for British and American word variants. For example:

p?diatric retrieves results that contain the words pediatric or paediatric. You can use both at once, for example: **p?diatric*** would find paediatric or paediatrician. Be aware though – it will also find podiatric! (But not podiatrist...)

However, you can't use the wildcard ? at the beginning of a word. You will have to use the different variants of the word instead: for example, **aesthetic or esthetic**.

11. What is adjacency searching?

This powerful operator searches for words near each other, in any order. Their proximity is determined by a number (1-7). It can also be used with truncation and phrase searching.

For example, **child* adj3 asthma***

Would include "child with asthma", "asthma in children" and "children who are asthmatic"

12. How do I search for thesaurus terms?

Your search should include thesaurus terms as well as natural language terms.

Thesaurus terms are a controlled vocabulary that lists words in groups of synonyms and related concepts. Indexers choose the thesaurus terms that describe the content of the articles. Every database has a different thesaurus.

Thesaurus terms can be combined with natural language terms to build a comprehensive search.

The index also acts as a thesaurus; it is structured so that we can choose to include broader or narrower terms, or terms that are closely related.

Enter one of the concept terms again into the search box. This time, tick the **Map term to subject heading box**:

This will search for the term in the thesaurus of the selected database and give a list of suggested subject headings. Note here that we have entered **heart attack** as our natural language term, but all articles with the subject of heart attacks come under the thesaurus heading **myocardial infarction**:

Tick the box next to the heading that is most appropriate for you, and click on continue.

Explode will search for documents where both the subject heading selected and any narrower subject headings are used. **Focus** will search only for documents where the subject heading is an important concept.

If you want more information about a heading, click on **Scope** and you can see a definition of that term, so you can be sure it is the one that is right for you.

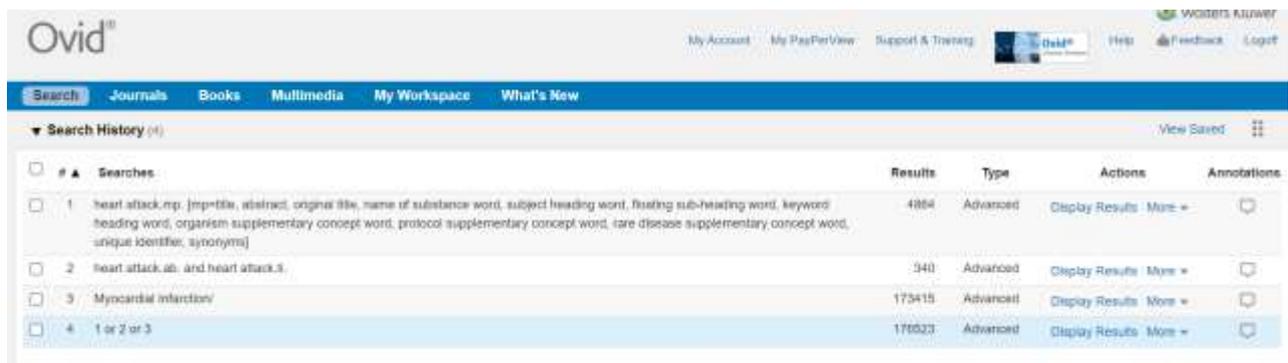
You will then see any subheadings for that term. This may help you if you are looking for a particular aspect about that term:

13. How do I combine search terms with OR/AND?

Tick the numbered box by every search term and press the **Combine with: OR** button.

These search terms will be searched for in the relevant fields of the millions of references in this database.

In a few seconds you should see the results of your search, creating the first line of your **search strategy**, which is highlighted in pale blue.



#	Searches	Results	Type	Actions	Annotations
1	heart attack.mp. [mp=title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms]	4864	Advanced	Display Results More	
2	heart attack.ab. and heart attack.s.	340	Advanced	Display Results More	
3	Myocardial infarction/	173415	Advanced	Display Results More	
4	1 or 2 or 3	176523	Advanced	Display Results More	

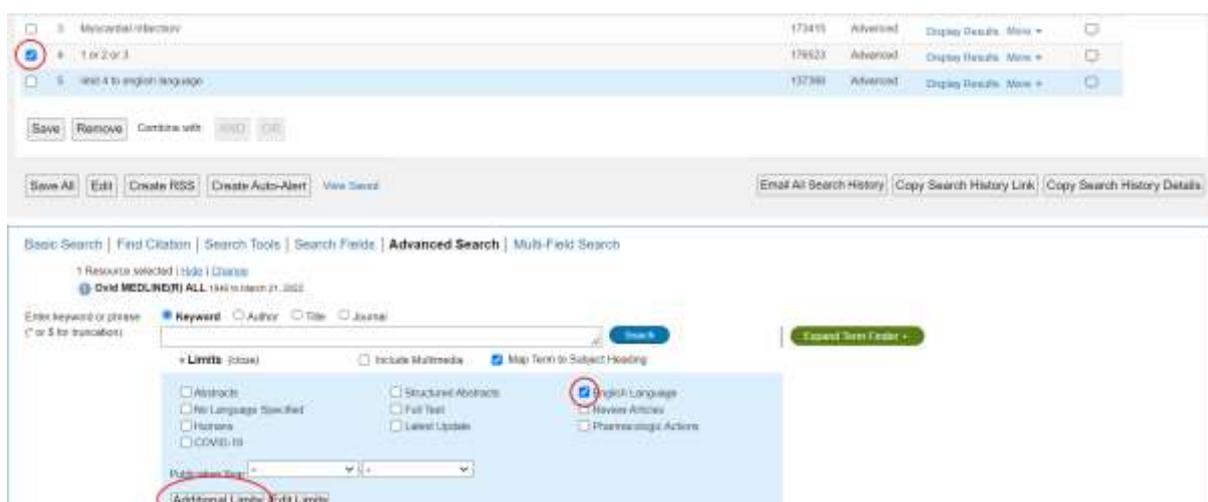
The combined set now displayed as a separate search line.

Repeat the process for each concept before combining all the **OR** results with **AND**.

14. How do I limit the results?

Below the search box, there is a blue box with some options for limiting your search, for example, if you would like results just in English, or you would like results from a specific time frame.

Tick the search line you would like to limit, and the limit option, and you will then see the results for your limited search.



The screenshot shows the search history table with three items. The second item, '1 or 2 or 3', is selected with a blue circle. Below the table are buttons for 'Save', 'Remove', 'Combine with: AND', and 'OR'. Further down are buttons for 'Save All', 'Edit', 'Create RSS', 'Create Auto-Alert', and 'View Saved'. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Email All Search History', 'Copy Search History Link', and 'Copy Search History Details'.

The 'Advanced Search' section is visible, showing a search box with 'Keyword' selected. Below the search box are various limit options:

- Abstracts
- No Language Specified
- Full Text
- Latest Update
- English Language
- Review Article
- Pharmacologic Action

At the bottom of the limit options, there is a section for 'Additional Limits' and 'Edit Limits'.

The additional limits allow you to be even more specific with your limits should you wish to be.

15. How do I edit a search line?

You may want to go back to a line to change it, for example if you have made a spelling mistake.

Next to the search line you want to edit, hover over the **More** button. From the drop down menu, choose **Edit**.

The screenshot shows the Ovid search history interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Search', 'Journals', 'Books', 'Multimedia', 'My Workspace', and 'What's New'. Below this is a 'Search History' section with a table of search entries. The table has columns for 'Searches', 'Results', 'Type', 'Actions', and 'Annotations'. The entry 'lead 4 to english language' is selected, and a dropdown menu is open next to the 'More' button, showing options like 'Edit', 'Create Auto-Alert', 'Create RSS', and 'Remove'.

On the next screen, press the little pencil icon, and you will be able to edit that line.

The screenshot shows the 'Edit Search History' interface. At the top, there are 'Cancel' and 'Run Search' buttons. Below this is a 'Searches' section with a table of search entries. The entry 'lead 4 to english language' is selected, and the 'Edit' button (pencil icon) is highlighted.

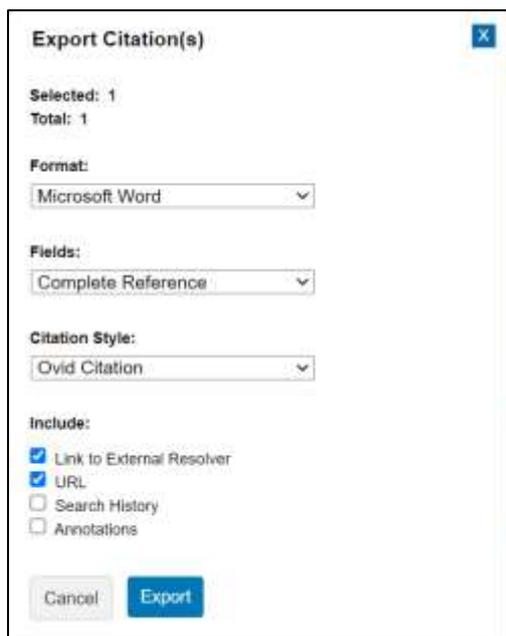
16. How do I select and save the search results I want to keep?

To save or export your chosen results, tick the box next to that result.

The screenshot shows the Ovid search results interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Print', 'Email', 'Export', 'My Projects', and 'Keep Selected'. Below this is a search results section with a table of search results. The first result is selected, and the 'Check Full Text' button is highlighted.

You can choose **Keep selected**, and you will be able to see your selected results in **My Workspace>My searches and alerts**.

Or you can choose **Export**, and you will be given a list of export options to choose from (for example, as a Word document, or a RIS file).



17. How do I copy my search strategy?

If you want to keep a copy of your search strategy, click on **Copy search history details**.

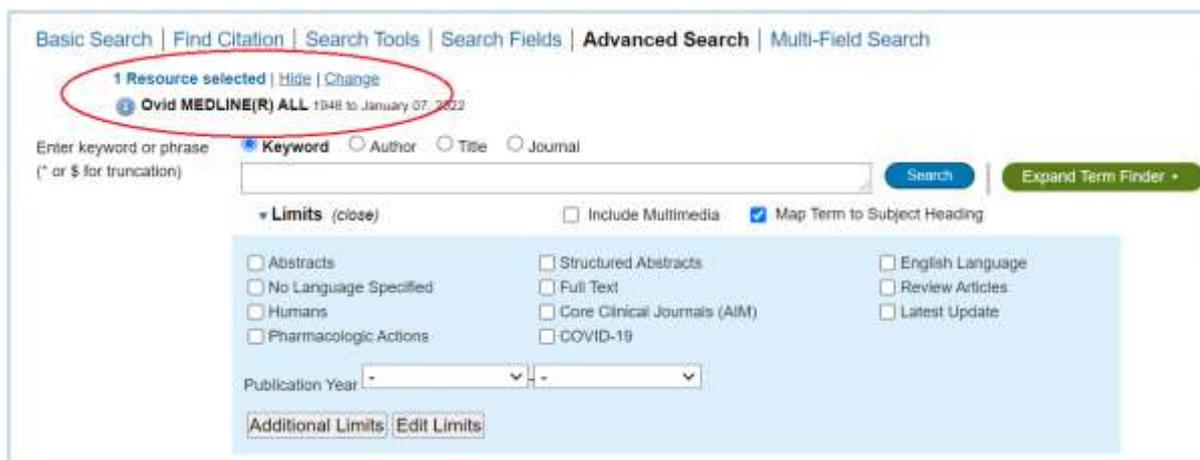


You can then copy your search into an Excel spreadsheet (or Word or Notepad if you prefer):

	A	B	C	D
	Ovid MEDLINE(R) ALL <1946 to March 21, 2022>			
1				
2				
3		heart attack.mp. [mp=title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept		4864
4		1 word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms]		
5		2 heart attack.ab. and heart attack.ti.		340
6		3 Myocardial Infarction/		173415
7		4 1 or 2 or 3		176523
8		5 limit 4 to english language		137366

18. How can I re-run a search in a different database?

You will see that there is **Resource selected** tab just above the search box. It tells you what database you are currently using, and you have the option to change here.



If you click on **Change**, a list of the available databases will appear. Tick the box of the one you would like to use, and press **Run search**.

However, be aware that different databases use different thesaurus headings. So some databases will not recognise a thesaurus term that you have used elsewhere. It will show the results as 0 next to that search line.



If this is the case, you will need to edit that line, and find the correct term for that database.

19. Why does Ovid keep running my old searches at the same time that I try to start a new search or run a previous search?

Make sure that you clear the search before you start a new search (make sure you have saved it first). You can do this by ticking the box next to your search and pressing **Remove**.

The screenshot shows the Ovid search history page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Search' highlighted. Below it, a 'Search History' section is visible, containing a table of search entries. The first entry is selected. At the bottom of the search history, there are buttons for 'Save' and 'Remove', with 'Remove' circled in red. Below these buttons are options for 'Continue with AND OR'.

	Results	Type	Actions	Annotations
1 heart attack.mp. [mp=abstract, file, subscription type; heading word, accession number]	05	Advanced	Display Results More +	
2 heart attack.ab. and heart attack.e.	6	Advanced	Display Results More +	
3 [Myocardial infarction]	6	Advanced	Save More +	
4 limit 1 to english language ([limit not valid: records were retained])	6	Advanced	Save More +	

Save Remove Continue with AND OR