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Framing Questions and Other Practical Tips

WHEN you begin to use Medical Subject Headings and the other special indexing features that are built into MEDLINE, your searches will become more productive. Practice helps too. Meanwhile, here are some suggestions.

Getting Started

Before doing an extensive MEDLINE search, make sure you understand the topic you are searching. Review articles are helpful in this regard. Is there an electronic book, guideline, or other resource that might answer your question? Many questions do not require a MEDLINE search, which is inevitably more time-consuming than a quick lookup in a book or electronic resource (see “Health Information on the Web” in Appendix A). Even if inadequate, a resource that synthesizes or synthesizes can help to sharpen your thinking about what, precisely, is to be asked in a MEDLINE search.

Before connecting to MEDLINE, write out the key concepts that you wish to explore. What MeSH terms might best capture these concepts? If you are not sure, take advantage of on-line MeSH resources.

Be Specific

Be specific in framing your question. You don’t want to find all the citations concerning HYPERTENSION or ASTHMA or ACQUIRED