

RCPSych Library Literature Searching Guide



Step 1: Establish the question

It is important to have a clear idea of the kind of results you want to find before you start searching. This will speed up the process and help avoid duplicating work. It is strongly recommended that you draft a search strategy before you start and keep it specific.

PICO and PEO are the two most common formats used to developing the search question and identifying appropriate search terms. Below you can see the two formats and worked examples. You can find a blank PICO chart online, or just draw your own.

P

Population

Who are the users, patients or community being affected? What are their symptoms, age, etc.?

I

Intervention

What is being done for the population? E.g. Screening, services, etc.

C

Comparison

Is there a control group and comparison element? E.g. different treatment options

O

Outcome

What do you want to achieve via the study or measure or change?

Population	Intervention	Comparison	Outcome
Schizophrenia	Clozapine	Olanzapine	Reduction of negative symptoms

Not every search will fit neatly into the PICO structure. PEO is an alternative that can be used where there is no intervention. You can also use a blank grid, the important thing is to properly consider and separate out your concepts before getting started.

P	Population	Who are the users, patients or community being affected? What are their symptoms, age, etc.?
E	Exposure	Use for a specific exposure
O	Outcome	What will you be measuring? For example, patient experiences or decreased hospitalisations

Population	Exposure	Outcome
Adolescents	Cannabis	Psychosis

Step 2: Define the search terms for the concepts in your question

Breaking the question into the important topic areas allows you to identify relevant terms and phrases. You need to include any alternative terms, synonyms and acronyms authors may have used. for the search. Remember to allow for American spelling.

Truncation

This trick can be used to search alternative endings of the same word. This is done by adding a *, for example **psychi*** will search psychiatry, psychiatric, psychiatrist or psychiatrists.

Phrase Searching

If you need to search a phrase it is important to use inverted commas, for example, "**community mental health team**" to search all of those words in that order.

Population

Adolescen*
"young person*"
"young people"
teenage*
child*
youth

Exposure

Cannabis
Cannabinoid*
Marijuana

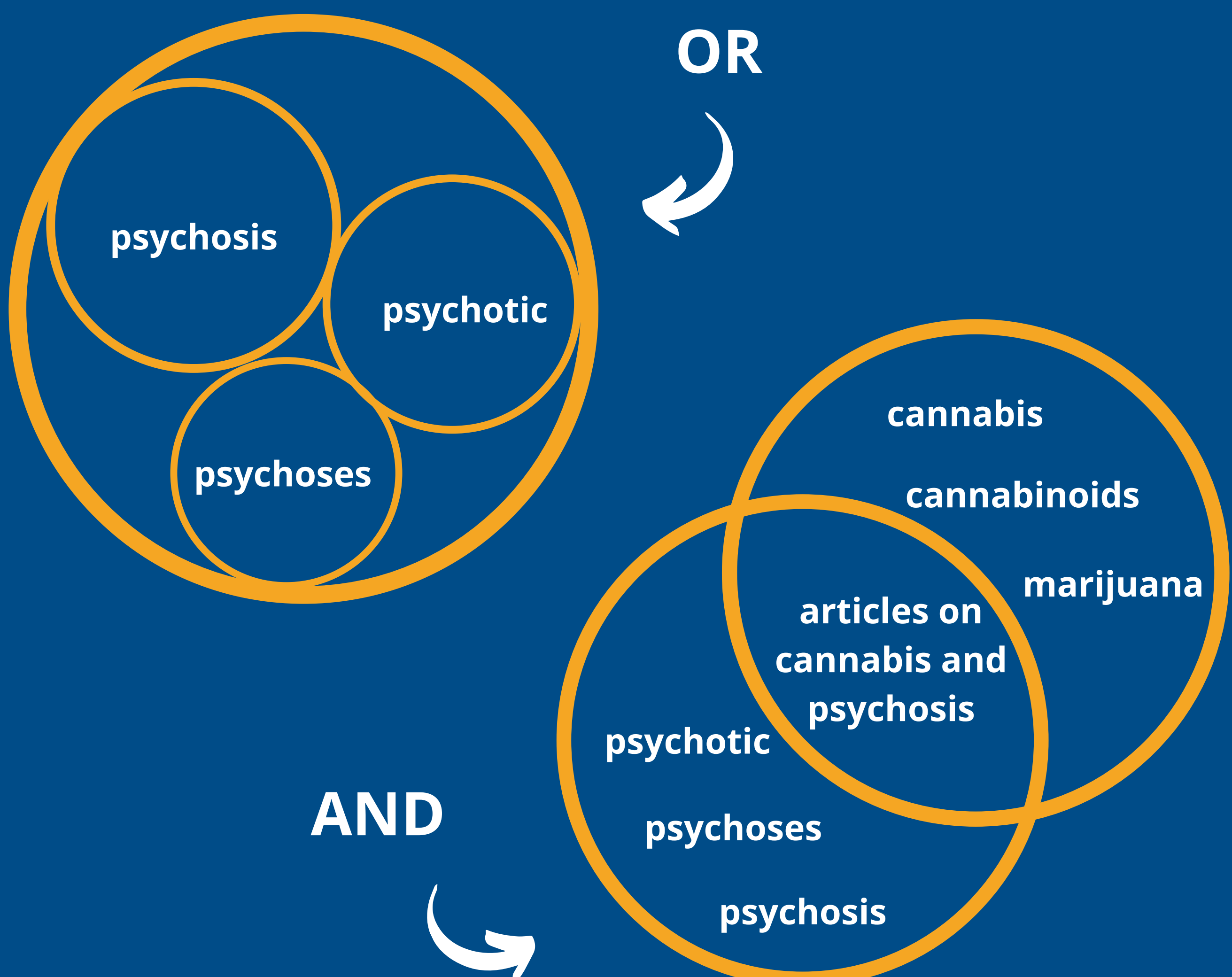
Outcome

Psychosis
Psychoses
Psychotic
Schizophreni*
Schizoaffective

Step 3: Boolean Searching

After you have entered all the terms you want to search with, you can start narrowing down the results using the Boolean Operators (AND, OR and NOT).

- OR is used to combine the synonymous terms you have compiled, you want to find any articles that include any of these terms (psychosis OR psychotic).
- AND is then used to combine multiple concepts, when you want to find results that contain both the terms being searched (psychosis AND cannabis).
- NOT is less commonly used but allows you to exclude results including certain terms (schizophrenia NOT schizoaffective).



Step 6: Choose your database

The College Library provides access to three databases and you may have access to more from other institutions. You can apply these search principles across all databases but the interfaces may be different.

Some databases may have different focuses, for example Embase has a pharmacological slant.

Step 6: Run your search

Using the steps above you can enter the search terms compiled into the database, with appropriate truncations, and apply the Booleans operators to get the best results available!

Step 6: Choose your limits

Are there any results you aren't interested in? You can limit your results by language, date, age groups, country of publication and many others depending on what database you are searching in.

Step 6: Review your results

You should always take a look at your initial results to check you are finding what you need. For example, one user was searching for IV (intravenous) only to find she was getting results about IV (4 in roman numerals).

You may also need to change your terms when searching across multiple databases to account for different subject headings or changes in preferred terminology.

Step 7: Exporting Results

If your literature search returns a high number of results, you can use reference management software, such as Endnote to collate. This allows you to keep track of what you have found and to remove any duplicate citations.

While the College does not provide access to reference management software, the following ones are freely available:

[Mendeley](#)

[Zotero](#)