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.

**Step 1: Establish the question**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Who are the users, patients or community being affected? What are their symptoms, age, etc.?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>What is being done for the population? E.g. Screening, services, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Is there a control group and comparison element? E.g. different treatment options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>What do you want to achieve via the study or measure or change?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What will you be measuring? For example, patient experiences or decreased hospitalisations.

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

Use for a specific exposure.

What will you be measuring? For example, patient experiences or decreased hospitalisations.

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.
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
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).
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: Choose your database

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: Run your search

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