# Evaluate your search results: trouble-shooting tips

## Irrelevant results

- Identify words in your searches that might have more than one meaning (e.g. ‘cold’ could refer to the common cold, or cool temperatures)
- Consult a dictionary, textbook, medical encyclopaedia, or expert in the subject for more appropriate search terms
- Use subject headings as clues to improve your searches. If you find an article that is very relevant to your research area, look at the subject headings or keywords it contains. These can be used to find more relevant results
- Consult database help pages to ensure you are using the right search syntax

## Too many results

- Add database limits, such as a date range, age range, language, or country
- Limit your search for terms to a particular field, such as title or abstract
- Add more concepts (e.g. if you are looking for a particular study design, like a randomised controlled trial, add that term into your search)
- Use more specific terms to describe each concept
- Use proximity operators to increase the likelihood that terms are used in a similar context

## Too few results

- Try different search terms
- Search for broader concepts
- Use truncation symbols (e.g. if you search for ‘depress*’ instead of ‘depression’, you will also find the terms ‘depressed’ and ‘depressive’)
- Use wildcards to retrieve alternative spellings (e.g. ‘p?ediatric’ will find both the term ‘paediatric’ and ‘pediatric’)
- Remove any unnecessary limits, such as date range or country
- Consider using a different database