Scopus – creating a search strategy using the Search History function

Why use the Search History function?

Whenever you carry out a search on Scopus (or any other database), the results are recorded in the database’s Search History. You can use the search history to combine those search results, using the Boolean ‘AND’ and ‘OR’ operators, to construct a search strategy that can be easily amended and developed: search terms can be added or removed at any point. This gives you greater control over the search strategy: it allows you to see the number of results returned for each of your search terms, making it easier to spot terms that return perhaps a very large number of results or, conversely, very few, giving you a clearer picture of why your search is not performing as you would expect.

How to use the Search History to construct a search

Once you have identified the key terms from your research question, including any alternative/variant terminology, search for each of these terms separately (applying limits, such as date, if applicable).

Each set of results will be recorded in the search history.

You can review the results for each search term to see if they meet your needs: are the search terms giving you too many results, or too few?

If you are not happy with any of the search terms it is easy to remove them from the Search History and replace them with another search term.
Once you are happy with the search terms, you then combine them using the Boolean AND and OR operators to construct your search strategy. If on reviewing the search results you come across additional terms that might inform or refine your search, it is easy to search on these terms and use the Search History to incorporate them into a revised version of your search strategy.

**Example search**

“What evidence is there that lifestyle interventions are effective for obese patients with type 2 diabetes?”

Identify the key terms that represent your topic and also any alternative terms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifestyle interventions</th>
<th>Obese</th>
<th>Type 2 diabetes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle modifications</td>
<td>Overweight</td>
<td>Type II diabetes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-insulin dependent diabetes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Search for each of these terms separately on Scopus, using phrase searching and wildcards if applicable, to build up the search history.

Search for the first term.
Your results will display. To view the Search History, click on Search.

The first line of the Search History will display.

View and see all of the search history. Repeat the process until all of your search terms appear in the Search History.
Once you are happy with the search terms, combine them using the Search History’s Combine Queries box. Combine each set of related terms first (with OR) in the form #1 OR #2.
The results of this combined search will display.

Click on Search to return to the Search History. The combined results have been added.

Repeat the procedure for the other sets of related terms.

This will produce a results sets for:
“lifestyle intervention*” OR “lifestyle modification*” [#1 or #2. This is added as Line 8 in the search history]
and
Obes* OR overweight [#3 or #4. This is added as Line 9 in the search history]
and
“type 2 diabetes” OR “type II diabetes” OR “non-insulin dependent diabetes” [#5 or #6 or #7. This is added as Line 10 in the search history]
Combine each of the result sets with AND. This is added as Line 11 in the search history.

Click on the document results to view.

If on reviewing the results you come across other terms that could be used to improve your strategy, you can search for these and use the Search History to incorporate them into your search strategy.

For example, the following result includes the phrase *Lifestyle change*, a relevant term which could be included to improve and develop the search strategy.

**Lifestyle change** reduces cardiometabolic risk factors and glucagon-like peptide-1 levels in obese first-degree relatives of people with diabetes.

Search for “lifestyle change*”.
The results will be added to the Search History.

Then combine this with the “lifestyle interventions” OR “lifestyle modifications” results set.

This revised search can then be combined with the ‘obesity’ search terms and the ‘diabetes’ search terms to produce an enhanced results set.
Creating a Scopus account

The Search History function can be used to produce very extensive, complex searches, so it is advisable to create an account on Scopus so you can save the search strategy permanently and re-run the search whenever you want.

Select **Register** and complete the form to create an account.

Always sign in before starting your search. You can save your search strategy at any point: it may be complete, or time constraints may cause you to leave it partially constructed.

Name the search and Save it
To view your search strategy, select the ‘three bars’ icon > My Scopus > Saved Searches option.

Click on the search name to view the results.