Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about searching Medline (Ovid)

Q. When do we know when to explode?

A. It all depends on your topic and what subject headings are available. The Tree is the listing of subject headings from broader to narrower. Need to check the Tree to see what might be listed as a narrower subject heading. In some instances you may want to explode a broader term so as to retrieve everything that has been tagged with a narrower term.

Eg Explode Lower Extremity will ensure that papers tagged with Lower extremity as well as those tagged with hip, thigh, ankle, foot, toe are all picked up. Tagging is done with the most specific subject heading e.g. a paper about a sprained ankle will be tagged with ankle and not lower extremity. In this instance you may choose to only check ankle and uncheck the broader subject heading. On the other hand, if your topic is about strengthening exercises for all parts of the lower extremity you will definitely wish to explode Lower extremity to include the more specific parts of the body and therefore not miss any papers.

Another example: if you wish to know what the rate of sports injuries are in Canada. You would want to explode Canada to pick up papers tagged with the whole country as well as those from the specific provinces.
In the tree you can also be selective. For example, in the Sports tree you may only wish to cherry pick those sporting activities that match your topic.

Q. When do you check or uncheck Map Term to Subject Heading?

A. It is a good idea to find out what subject headings are available to describe your topic first. This way you can get information about the most accurate subject heading for your topic, discover additional subject headings you may need to use, and get ideas of some synonyms you need for a keyword search.

Q. Why is PICO used?

A. To search the licensed databases systematically, you need to search one concept at a time. For health topics, using the PICO framework is a great aid to being methodical. The process is to type one of the concepts, or ideas, from your PICO in the search box and check on the Map Term to Subject Heading in order for the system to try and find an appropriate one. The resulting list of subject headings (blue and underlined) opens to door to more exploration – checking the Scope note and checking the Tree.

Once you have completed your exploration and chosen the appropriate subject heading, you want to search for your concept using the keyword search. This is when you uncheck the Map Term to Subject Heading and type in your synonyms for your concept separated by the OR operator.
Q. How to find keywords?

A. There are several tips to help with finding keywords: The first is your own knowledge: another word for physical therapy is physiotherapy. To find papers that have used either of these terms you will need to search both combined with OR. Another method: Check the Scope note for the subject heading and look under Used For. This list will include synonyms and examples of singular and plural which reminds you to allow for both in your search. A third method is to scan the titles and abstracts of appropriate papers to see what words the authors are using. A good example: telerehabilitation is written about as a distance rehabilitation, remote rehabilitation, virtual rehabilitation etc. To be sure to pick up these papers you will need to include all these variations connected with OR.

Q. What are Truncation symbols and when to use them?
A. In Ovid the truncation symbols are:
   : which is rarely used
   $ this was the previous symbol and is generally used with older papers
   * most frequently used, and easiest to remember

Truncation is used to allow for variant endings with any number of additional letters eg walk* will include walk, walks, walking, walker, walkers etc.

Q. Where to get further help?

A. Watch the You Tube videos at http://guides.library.ubc.ca/medline. Mail charlotte.beck@ubc.ca