Introduction
Knowing the best way to go from your PICO to CINAHL can take some practice. This tutorial will introduce you to taking your PICO and devising the best way to search CINAHL.

1. Making a PICO
Before you begin searching CINAHL try to fit your research question to the PICO framework. Remember that PICO stands for patient (or population or problem), Intervention, Comparison, and Outcome. Below you can see an example of how a research question can be parsed into the PICO framework.

Example research question: Does education help prevent childhood obesity?

P (patient, problem, population): Childhood obesity
Intervention: Education
Comparison: No education
Outcome: Prevention

Note that my intervention and comparison are education and lack of education. This means when I start my search I will only include the search term “education” for my intervention and comparison. If you are comparing two drugs, two different therapies, a drug or a supplement and a placebo, etc. you would want to include search terms for both your intervention and comparison.

Before searching the database you need to decide which of your PICO elements will become keywords and which will become limiters. Concepts around sex and age are best used as limiters. Below is an example of how I took my PICO from above and decided which elements should be keywords and which should be limiters. Limiters also allow you to add concepts not included in your PICO to your search strategy. These could include type or article (research, review, etc.) publication date, etc.

Example keywords: Obesity Education Prevention
Example limiters: Children research article peer reviewed

The strategies demonstrated in this tutorial will work even if your research question does not fit into the PICO framework. Just pull the most important keywords out of your research question and think critically about which will work as keywords and which will work as limiters.
2. Searching CINAHL

To navigate to CINAHL click the CINAHL link on the library home page (https://www.framingham.edu/academics/henry-whittemore-library/). When you open CINAHL the basic search page will be displayed.

Once you are on the advanced search page enter your **keywords** into the search boxes.

The limiters can be found in the “Limit your results box”. There are several different options for limiters so make sure you scroll all the way to the bottom of the page!

It is a best practice to enter one keyword per search box. This will allow you to more easily refine your search later.

If you have more keywords than search boxes click the plus sign icon beside the last search box.
Since my research question was about childhood obesity I have selected “All Child” from the “Age Groups” limiter. I was also interested just in research, so I have selected “Research” under the “Publication Types” limiter. I also selected “Peer Reviewed” to ensure that I only get peer reviewed content in my search results.

Limiters, as the name suggest, limit the number of results returned. When starting a search it is best to stick with two or three limiters. You can always limit a search from the results page if you have more results than you can handle, but if you add to many limiters to your search from the beginning you may miss out on valuable information.
3. Fine Tuning Your Search Results

Remember that literature searching is an ongoing, interactive process. The first search you run will probably need to be fine-tuned before you get the solid results you are looking for.

In this example I was returned with more than 800 search results.

It is a good idea to scan the first page or two of results to check for relevancy before continuing with your search. In the example search I found the following result on the first page.

The article title and the subjects show us that this article is not relevant to the example research question. (When I scrolled down in the abstract there was one passing mention of “obesity” and this is why the result was returned in the search)
The best strategy for filtering out results that are not relevant is to force the database to search for a particular keyword in one field. The most useful field to limit a keyword to is the “word in subject heading” field. You can do this by selecting the drop down beside the chosen keyword and selecting the option “MW Word in Subject Heading”.

A subject heading is a concept that the database has applied to all the papers on that particular subject. All of the papers about obesity will have the subject heading “obesity” applied to them. Subject headings are also a way to control for varying vocabularies. A paper that does not discuss “obesity”, but is about educating children to prevent them from being overweight will have the subject heading “obesity” applied to it.
By changing the fields searched to just the subject headings, rather than all fields. The number of results decreased by over 200. We can also be more confident that all of the results are relevant.

Conclusion
I hope this tutorial has given you the power to go from your research question and PICO to searching CINAHL. Keep in mind that librarians are always here to help. Feel free to contact the reference department by email at reference@framingham.edu.

For more information on searching the nursing literature please see our How to Search the Nursing Literature LibGuide: http://libguides.framingham.edu/NursingLiterature

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