Tips for Searching for Evidence

Be sure to formulate a PICO question *before* you go to a database. This will help ensure that you know what you are searching for to avoid irrelevant information and find important information.

Search by a Hierarchy:

1. Pre-filtered evidence (practice guidelines, systematic review, meta-analysis)
2. Empirical evidence related to your client
3. Related population or basic science theoretical evidence

Classes of Evidence to Prove that a Treatment Works ("Treatment Efficacy")

*These classifications are based on the research design. Different research designs control for biases in different ways. Ideally, there should be no to minimal bias in the experiment to prove that the treatment (and not some other factor, such as maturation, novelty, etc.) is at play.

Class I: Prospective, randomized controlled trial (RCT) with large samples. Ideally, single-blinded (the person scoring pre/post measures does not know which group the participants were in).

Class II: Smaller group designs; non-randomized assignment to groups.
Multiple baseline across participants with clearly established baseline control. This means that baseline measures were not changing, and then show a dramatic change when treatment was initiated.

Class III: Case study with small groups. Correlational studies. Longitudinal studies. Articles based only on expert consensus opinion.

*****Be sure that you always search in more than one database to avoid selection biases!!**

Tips to EXPAND your search	Tips to NARROW your search
Try next level down on hierarchy (e.g., consider looking at related population evidence). Also try using fewer search terms.	Focus your PICO question – be sure you specify the population, intervention, and type of outcome you're interested in.
Use other search terms, such as *Subject* headings. Use available indices to ensure you selected the best terms.	Use subheadings (check indices). Try to search by a *Title* word or add a key *Author*.
Combine search terms with *OR*.	Combine search terms with *AND* or *NOT*.
Remove filters (e.g., dates, document type).	Apply filters.
Use truncation of terms.	Use specific words or "quotes."
Complete hand searches.	Add additional search terms to query.

When reading the Abstract of an article, ask yourself these questions:

- Is my client similar enough to the participants in this study?
- Do the outcomes reported match my client's values and preferences?
- Is this treatment feasible in my setting?
- Are the results clinically important enough to justify using this approach with my client?
- Does this research design allow me to make conclusions about treatment efficacy?

Now comes the fun part… access and read the articles!! ☺