# PRESS 2015 checklist for search strategies

1. **Translation of the research question**

* Does the search strategy match the research question/PICO?
* Are the search concepts clear?
* Are there too many or too few PICO elements included?
* Are the search concepts too narrow or too broad?
* Does the search retrieve too many or too few records?
* Are unconventional or complex strategies explained?

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| A – No revisions |  |
| B – Revisions suggested |  |
| C – Revisions required |  |

If B or C, please provide an explanation or example:

1. **Boolean and proximity operators**

* Are Boolean or proximity operators used correctly?
* Is the use of nesting with brackets appropriate and effective for the search?
* If NOT is used, is this likely to result in any unintended exclusions?
* Could precision be improved by using proximity operators (e.g., adjacent, near, within) or phrase-searching instead of AND?
* Is the width of proximity operators suitable (e.g., might adj5 pick up more variants than adj2)?

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If B or C, please provide an explanation or example:

1. **Subject headings**

* Are the subject headings relevant?
* Are any relevant subject headings missing; e.g., previous index terms?
* Are any subject headings too broad or too narrow?
* Are subject headings exploded where necessary and vice versa?
* Are major headings (“starring” or restrict to focus) used? If so, is there adequate justification?
* Are subheadings missing?
* Are subheadings attached to subject headings? (Floating subheadings may be preferred.)
* Are floating subheadings relevant and used appropriately?
* Are both subject headings and terms in free text (see below) used for each concept?

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If B or C, please provide an explanation or example:

1. **Text word searching**

* Does the search include all spelling variants in free text (e.g., UK versus US spelling)?
* Does the search include all synonyms or antonyms (e.g., opposites)?
* Does the search capture relevant truncation (i.e., is truncation at the correct place)?
* Is the truncation too broad or too narrow?
* Are acronyms or abbreviations used appropriately? Do they capture irrelevant material? Are the full terms also included?
* Are the keywords specific enough or too broad? Are too many or too few keywords used? Are stop words used?
* Have the appropriate fields been searched; e.g., is the choice of the text word fields (.tw.) or all fields (.af.) appropriate? Are there any other fields to be included or excluded (database-specific)?
* Should any long strings be broken into several shorter search statements?

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If B or C, please provide an explanation or example:

1. **Spelling, syntax and line numbers**

* Are there any spelling errors?
* Are there any errors in system syntax; e.g., the use of a truncation symbol from a different search interface?
* Are there incorrect line combinations or orphan lines (i.e., lines that are not referred to in the final summation that could indicate an error in an AND or OR statement)?

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If B or C, please provide an explanation or example:

1. **Limits and filters**

* Are all limits and filters used appropriately and are they relevant given the research question?
* Are all limits and filters used appropriately and are they relevant for the database?
* Are any potentially helpful limits or filters missing? Are the limits or filters too broad or too narrow? Can any limits or filters be added or taken away?
* Are sources cited for the filters used?

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If B or C, please provide an explanation or example:

**Overall evaluation**  
(If one or more “revision required” is noted above, the response below must be “revisions required”)

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| --- | --- |
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Source: McGowan J, Sampson M, Salzwedel DM, Cogo E, Foerster V, Lefebvre C. PRESS Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies: 2015 Guideline Statement. J Clin Epidemiol. 2016 Jul;75:40–46.