

# Defining your question: PICO and PS

## A summary of

Health Evidence &nbsp;(2009). Developing an Efficient Search Strategy. Available from: <http://www.healthevidence.org/practice-tools.aspx&nbsp;>



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National Collaborating Centre  
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## Categories:

Tool, Define

## Date posted:

July 19, 2012

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September 12, 2017

## Tool

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## Relevance For Public Health

This tool can be used to develop searchable questions as the first step in using research evidence to inform decision making. The tool documents search terms to examine the context around an issue and interventions to address the problem.

## Description

This tool, [Developing an Efficient Search Strategy using PICO](#), was created by [Health Evidence](#). It helps users to develop a searchable question, which is a fundamental step in using research evidence to inform decision making. This fillable form helps users articulate a searchable question and document search terms for a search strategy.

This tool helps users define questions for quantitative research (PICO) and qualitative research (PS). The PICO format creates searchable questions that address issues of intervention effectiveness or clinical questions, while the PS format examines questions related to understanding how and why the issue exists. Creating searchable questions involves identifying key words and search terms according to:

- PICO: Population, Intervention or Exposure (PECO), Comparison, Outcomes; or
- PS: Population, Situation.

To learn more about PICO and PS, see NCCMT's online learning module, [Introduction to Evidence-Informed Decision Making](#) and [Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine](#). To learn more about defining your question, see the webcast, [Define](#). There is evidence that using PICO to create a searchable question retrieves more relevant citations than using a standard database interface alone (Schardt et al., 2007).

This tool consists of two parts:

- PICO Search Terms Table: For Searchable Quantitative Research Questions
- PS Search Terms Table: For Searchable Qualitative Research Questions

Users can access this tool along with other resources to support the use of research, such as checklists and flowcharts, from Health Evidence at [Tools to support evidence-informed decision making](#).

## Implementing the Tool

### Who is Involved?

Librarians, project specialists, consultants and others involved in creating search strategies would use this resource.

### Steps for Using Tool

The tool, *Developing an Efficient Search Strategy using PICO*, consists of a table for PICO and one for PS. Each table is a fillable form that provides an example from a clinical question and prompts users to document synonyms or key words and MeSH headings (Medical Subject Headings).

To learn more about MeSH headings, see the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#).

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These summaries are written by the NCCMT to condense and to provide an overview of the resources listed in the [Registry of Methods and Tools](#) and to give suggestions for their use in a public health context. For more information on individual methods and tools included in the review, please consult the authors/developers of the original resources.

## Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

### Evaluation

Has not been evaluated

### Validity

Not applicable

### Reliability

Not applicable

### Methodological Rating



Unknown/No evidence

## Tool Development

### Developers

Health Evidence

Website: [www.healthevidence.org](http://www.healthevidence.org)

### Method of Development

Information not available

### Release Date

2009

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## Resources

<b>Title of Primary Resource</b>	Developing an Efficient Search Strategy using PICO
<b>File Attachment</b>	None
<b>Web-link</b>	<a href="http://www.healthevidence.org/practice-tools.aspx">http://www.healthevidence.org/practice-tools.aspx</a>
<b>Reference</b>	Health Evidence (2009). <i>Developing an Efficient Search Strategy</i> . Available from: <a href="http://www.healthevidence.org/practice-tools.aspx">http://www.healthevidence.org/practice-tools.aspx</a>
<b>Type of Material</b>	Worksheet
<b>Format</b>	On-line Access
<b>Cost to Access</b>	None.
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Conditions for Use</b>	Requirements for adapting this tool include: Health Evidence is acknowledged for tool development; adapted tool cannot be used for profit (not to be sold).

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<b>Title of Supplementary Resource</b>	Utilization of the PICO framework to improve searching PubMed for clinical questions.
<b>File Attachment</b>	None
<b>Web-link</b>	<a href="http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6947/7/16">http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6947/7/16</a>
<b>Reference</b>	Schardt, C., Adams, M. B., Owens, T., Keitz, S., & Fontelo, P. (2007). Utilization of the PICO framework to improve searching PubMed for clinical questions. <i>BMC Medical Informatics &amp; Decision Making</i> , 7: 16. doi:10.1186/1472-6947-7-16.
<b>Type of Material</b>	Journal article
<b>Format</b>	Periodical
<b>Cost to Access</b>	None.
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Conditions for Use</b>	Copyright © 2007 Schardt et al; licensee BioMed Central Ltd.

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