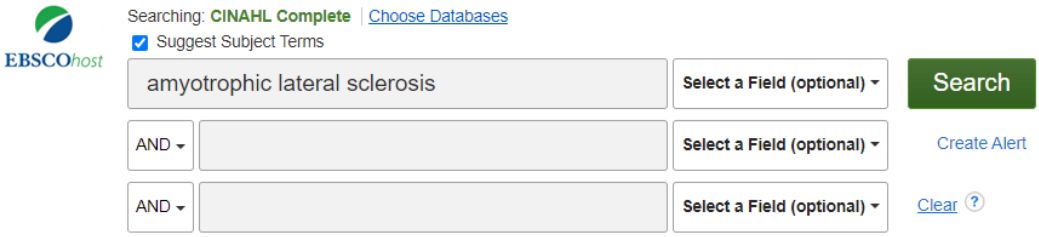
Searching in CINAHL (EBSCO)

CINAHL is a database that contains nursing and allied health literature. CINAHL is searched using a combination of subject headings (called **CINAHL headings**) and keywords.

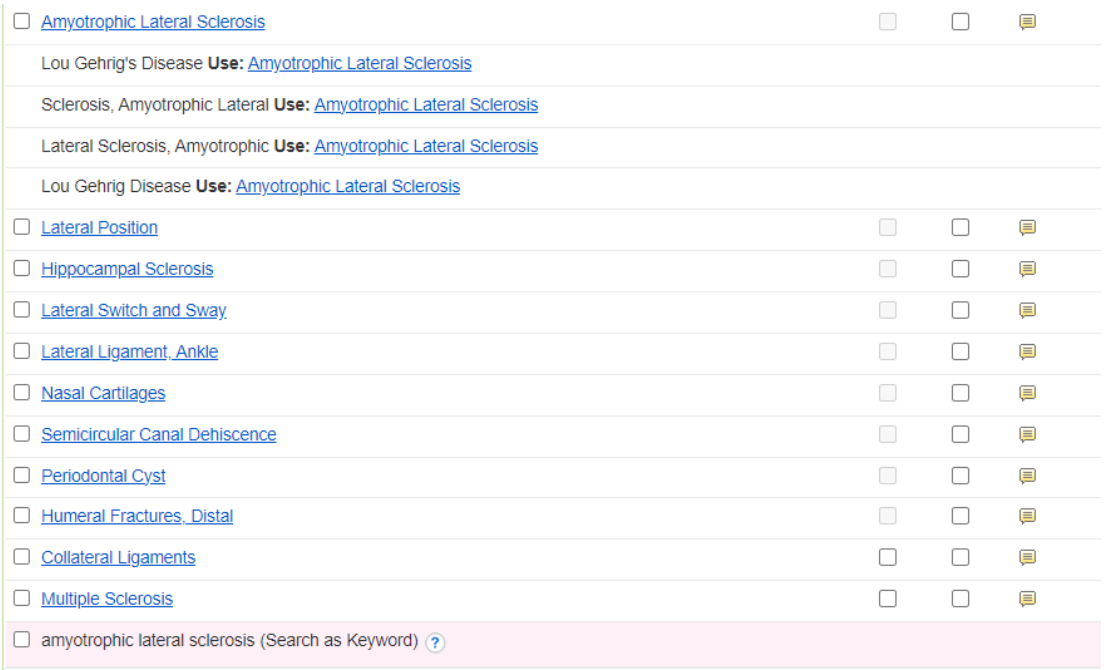
CINAHL searches are conducted line-by-line, with each concept searched separately and then combined with Boolean operators (AND and OR).

The following searches aim to find an article comparing two tools used to diagnose amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) - diffusion tensor imaging and magnetic resonance spectroscopy. These terms should be searched separately to ensure you get the most relevant results.

1. To start searching in CINAHL, type your first keyword into the search box. Make sure the **'Suggest Subject Terms'** box is checked - this will tell the database to automatically search for a matching subject heading to use.



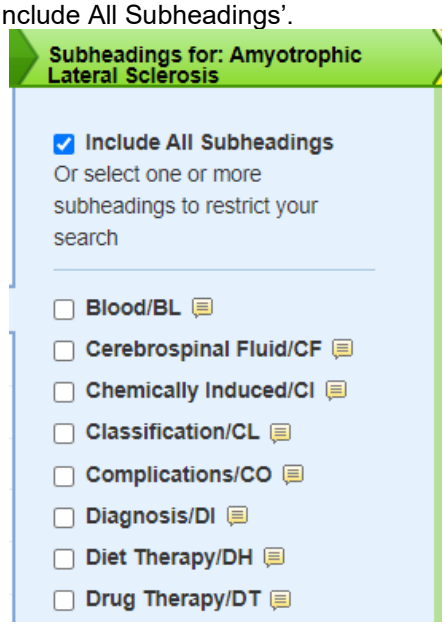
2. The next page contains a list of subject headings. CINAHL recommends headings that closest match your search terms.



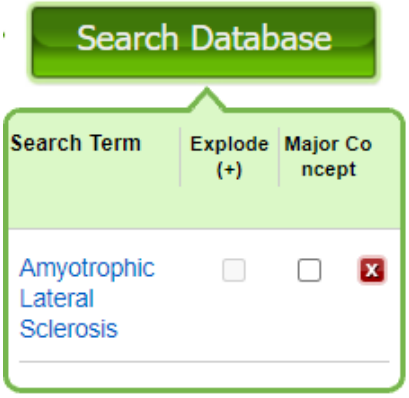
3. Before selecting a subject heading, click the 'Scope' icon ( ). This will give you the definition of the term to ensure you're using it correctly.

4. Click on the subject heading to see where it falls in the hierarchy. This will show you if there's a more specific term you could be using instead.

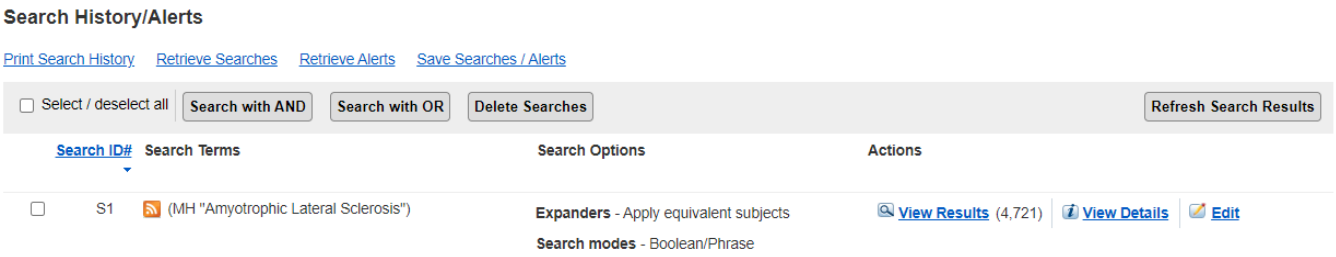
5. Click the checkbox next to the subject heading you want to use. A box will appear showing the 'subheadings' assigned to the subject heading you have selected. While some articles are assigned specific subheadings, it's best to include all of them to ensure that you don't exclude any potentially relevant results. To do this, click 'Include All Subheadings'.



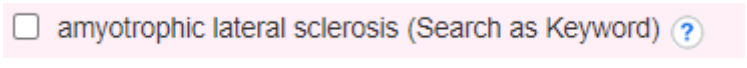
6. The heading you have selected will appear in a box on the right. Click **'Search Database'** to select the heading and move to the next step.



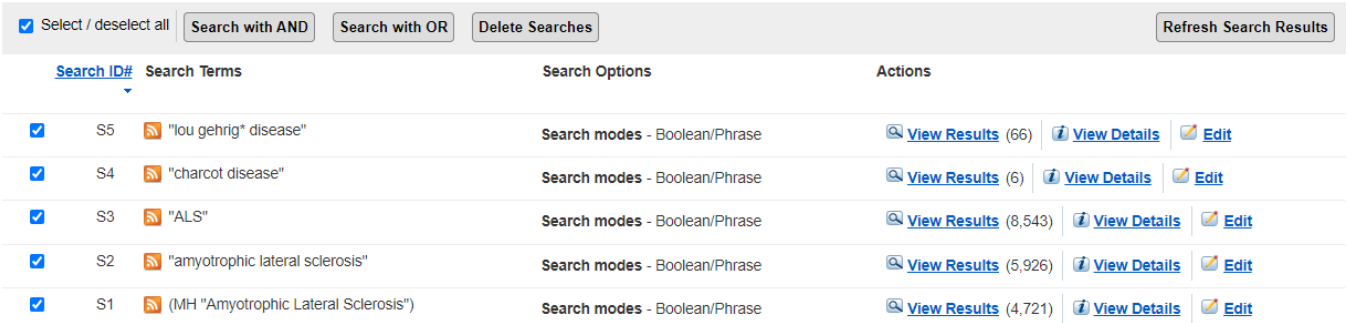
7. This will add the subject heading to your search history.



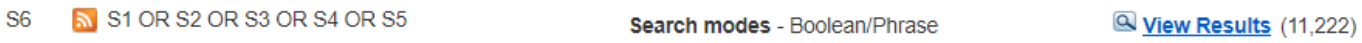
8. To add the keyword 'amyotrophic lateral sclerosis' to your search, search for it again. Instead of selecting the subject heading, click the box next to 'amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Search as Keyword)' and click **'Search Database'**.



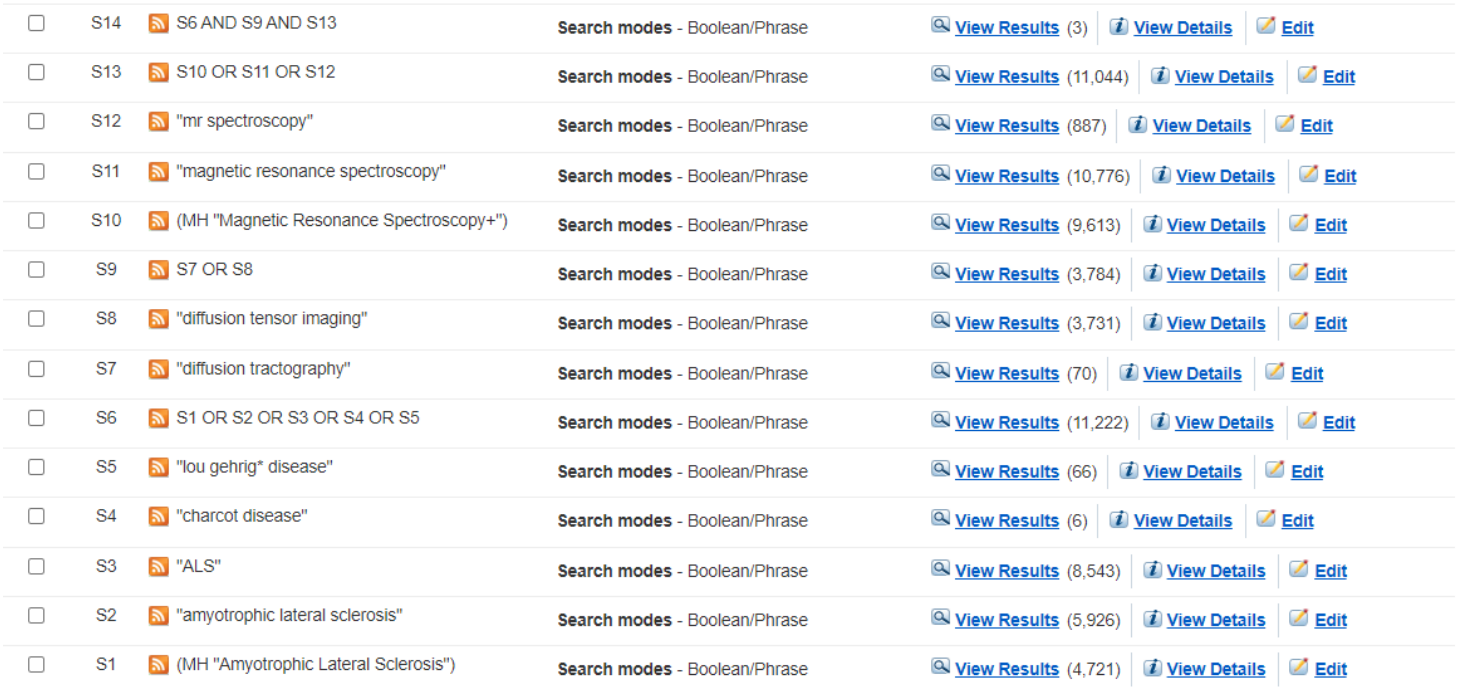
9. Search for all possible synonyms for each concept, then check the boxes next to them.



10. Click '**Search with OR**' to search for all the terms at once. This will create the following line:



11. Repeat this process for all of your search concepts, then combine each OR line with AND. Below is the completed search history for this question. Lines 6, 9, and 13 are combinations of each concept. Line 14 searches these combinations to find all articles that include a search term from each concept.



Advanced search syntax

The table below contains the advanced search syntax that can be incorporated into a CINAHL search to improve its accuracy and increase the number of results.

Note: in this guide, ***n*** stands for a number, not the letter n. To use these operators, replace the ***n*** with the number of letters or numbers you'd like in between terms.

Syntax	Symbol	Example	Function
Truncation	*	depress*	Finds 'alternate endings' to a word
Truncation within	*	sul*ur	Replaces multiple characters within

words			a word
Mandated wildcard	**?**	wom?n	Replaces 1 letter
Optional wildcard	**#**	p#ediatric	Replaces 0-1 letters
Nesting	**(...)**	behavio?r AND (depression OR anxiety)	Group similar terms in a search
Proximity - near	**N*n***	disturb* N3 sleep	Find a word within a specified limit or another word (in any order)
Proximity - within	**W*n***	disturb* W3 sleep	Find a word within a specified limit of another word in the order specified
Phrase search	**“ ”**	“quality of life”	Search for phrases as a single concept