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Step 1: 'What do I need to know?'

To get the right information, you must ask the right question. So, it's important to spend some time thinking carefully about what the right question would look like to get the information you need.

Writing a search question

In the course of your everyday work, you will sometimes need to find more information about a particular subject or condition - either for yourself or a person who uses services - in order to solve a problem and/or become more knowledgeable on a topic.

In any given situation, a very focused search question will make it much easier to find the information you need.

What to consider:

- What is the issue you are interested in and who does it affect?
- What are the outcomes you are interested in achieving? For example, are you looking for practical or theoretical information, historical or current information.

Example:

You are working with a 9-year old boy with autism. Over the last few months he has been having trouble sleeping which is making his behaviour increasingly challenging and his parents are struggling to cope.

In this case, the issues you will be interested in are autism, sleep disturbance and parental coping skills.

Possible search questions:

- “What treatments are available for sleep disturbance in children with autism?”
- “What support services are available for parents of children with autism?”

When writing search questions, there are some questions you can ask yourself to help decide what your question should be -

- Who is the question about?
- What, exactly you need?
- What is the desired outcome (how will you use the information you find)?

Example

You are working with a 21-year old woman with mental health problems including depression and anxiety. Her GP has suggested drug therapy but she is reluctant and is interested in trying cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) as an alternative. She asks you which therapy is more effective in treating depression and anxiety.

In this case, you are interested in depression and anxiety in young women, however you are looking to compare two treatments - drug therapy and CBT.

Possible search questions:

“What are effective treatments for women with depression and anxiety?”

“Is drug therapy or CBT effective at treating depression and anxiety in women?”

Search words

When you have thought about what you want to find with your search question, the next step is to think about the search words that you could use to find the information you need.

Identifying search words or keywords will help you find quality information on search engines, online databases or online information portals.

Examples of keywords are highlighted in bold below:

How does **autism** in **children** affect their **sleep patterns**?
How effective is **drug therapy** compared to **CBT** in treating **depression** and **anxiety**?

Equivalent words

It is important to consider other words to use when formulating a search question.

Be aware that using different search words will return different results. It is always a good idea to try a couple and compare the results.

Examples:

Work

Equivalent words: employment, job, occupation.

Stress

Equivalent words: anxiety, worry, pressure, strain.