

A checklist to assess database-hosting platforms for designing and running searches for systematic reviews: inclusion of HDAS (from NHS Evidence)

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Criteria on which ALL host platforms performed poorly:

- Ability to insert new lines of search into existing search
- Ability to move search lines around within search
- Option to choose fields to display

Criteria on which EBSCOHost, ProQuest and HDAS performed poorly and OvidSP performed well:

- Ability to select all results from complete set of records rather than page by page
- Ability to save a search history
- Can handle long and complex searches, >50 lines long
- Can handle large numbers of records >1000

Table 1: Average results of IS grading of host platforms across all the checklist criteria.

NOTE: 55 criteria in total

GRADE	EBSCO Host	OvidSP	ProQuest	HDAS
1	12	2	11	12
1.5	4	3	7	2
2	9	4	8	6
2.5	6	4	8	6
3	24	42	21	29

1.5 and 2.5 are averaged scores of the two authors

Criteria on which all four host platforms performed well:

- Searching using Boolean terms, proximity terms, right truncation, parenthesis
- Combining parentheses within strings with Boolean
- Searching using Subject headings e.g. MeSH
- Ability to choose multiple terms from the thesaurus
- Can move onto next record when in full record display
- A wide choice of export/download options
- Is compatible with major reference management systems

WHY?

As Information Specialists working at developing and running complex searches we were becoming increasingly frustrated that we could not run the type of search needed for a systematic review due to the user interface of the host platform.

HOW:

We sat and discussed all the criteria that we needed to have in the user interface which would make the running of a complex search smooth (even fun). We agreed whether list of criteria were essential or desirable. This became our checklist of 55 criteria.

In 2012 we independently used the checklist to grade three (EBSCOHost, OvidSP, ProQuest) of the most popular host platforms against this checklist. This year, 2014, we decided to grade HDAS using our checklist and add it to our findings.

Grades:

- 1- **Bad.** did not perform the function or was ineffective.
- 2- **Okay.** did perform the function but was not intuitive.
- 3- **Good.** performed it well.

See table on the left for the findings

RESULTS:

OvidSP – best

HDAS – scored well on over half the criteria

EBSCOHost – scored well on just over half the criteria

ProQuest – trailed in last place

NOW WHAT?

We think this information is very useful to influence the development of host platforms, for those purchasing databases

Continue to monitor the developments in host platforms

The checklist is a working tool, so encourage others to use and amend it for their own purposes

Investigate whether databases are commonly selected based on the ease of searching

Terminology:

Databases: where all the useful references are stored

Host platforms: where the databases are stored for you to access

User interface: the screens you as the user see and use

HDAS, EBSCOHost, OvidSP, ProQuest: hosting platform for many different databases

Examples of essential criteria from the checklist:

- Command line searches
- Boolean terms
- Phrase searching
- Adjacency terms
- Right truncation
- Parenthesis
- Combining parentheses within strings with Boolean
- Combining parentheses with multiple field codes
- Field codes available to use
- Ability to combine field codes (e.g. ti,ab)
- Ability to search using subject headings e.g. MeSH
- Ability to combine controlled vocabulary terms with free-text
- Build up searches line-by-line with the number of hits visible for each string
- Select all results from complete set of records rather than page-by-page
- A wide choice of export/download options
- Can save search history
- Can handle long and complex searches, >50 lines long
- Can handle large numbers of records >1000
- Results are consistent