BURNING QUESTIONS:

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE HEALTH LIBRARIANS' SEA FILTERS SURVEY

EUNICE ANG

MEDICAL LIBRARIAN

NORTHERN HEALTH LIBRARY

PROJECT BACKGROUND

- Gather information about how health librarians are dealing with search filters and find best practices or consensus that is grounded in reality and experience.
- Project received the HLA Anne Harrison Award in 2024

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Survey is broken up into 3 parts:

1. About you
2. About your knowledge and use of **TOPIC** search filters
3. About your knowledge and use of **METHODOLOGICAL** search filters

Definitions:

Topic search filters: retrieve studies related to a particular topic, e.g. palliative care or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Methodological search filters: retrieve studies related to a particular study type/design, e.g. systematic reviews, randomised controlled trials, animal/human studies.

SURVEY BACKGROUND

- Survey period: 13 January to 13 April 2026
- Disseminated via Microsoft Forms to the
  HLA Listserv (hla-members@alia.org.au) &
  NZ Health Listserv (health-info@lists.vuw.ac.nz)
- Posted on HLA website, HLA Facebook and HLA LinkedIn
- Health Librarians CoP and Health Library Managers CoP also disseminated the survey at my request
- Reminder sent to listservs on 19 March 2026
- Target audience:
  - Have worked/currently works in a health library setting
  - Have heard of topic or methodological search filters (do not need to have used them)
  - Do not have to have “librarian” in their job title

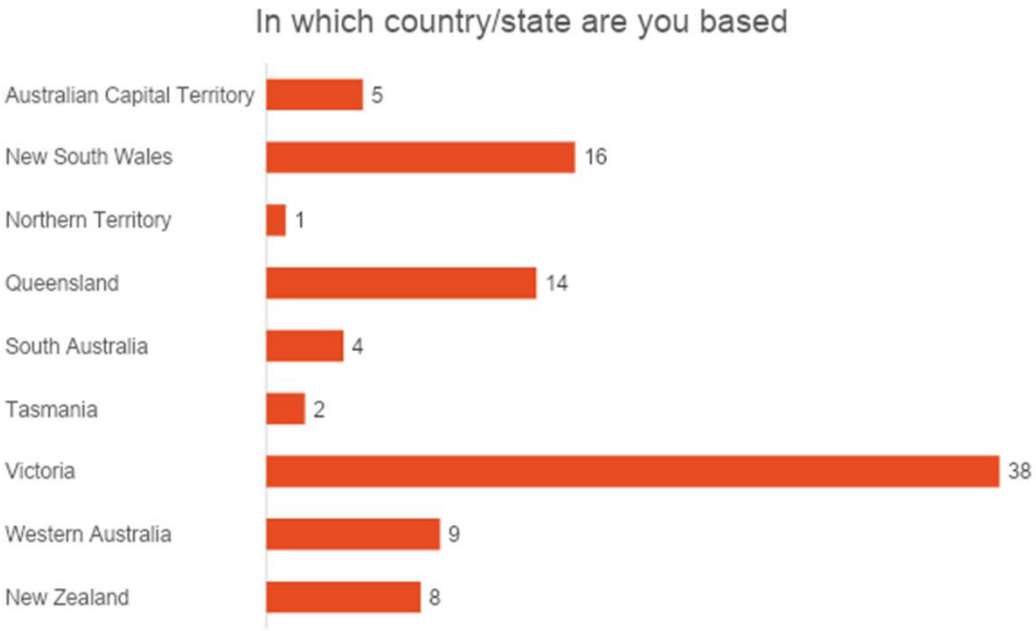
PILOT TESTING

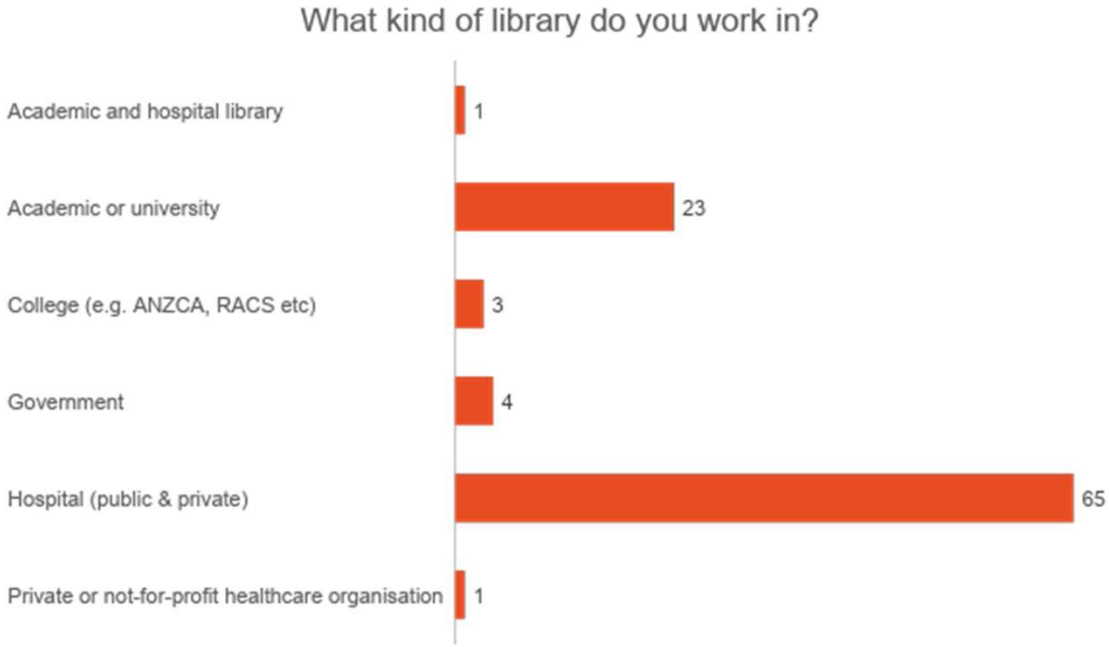
- Changes to survey questions made for clarity and phrasing
- No biased or misleading questions
- Thank you to all pilot testers!

Alice Anderson, Tania Barry, Maddie Beer, Mozhdeh Deghani, Cass Gorton, Ruth Lawrence, Keren Moskal, Mina Nichols-Boyd, Rob Penfold, Pat Stott, Lauren Videon

DEMOGRAPHY

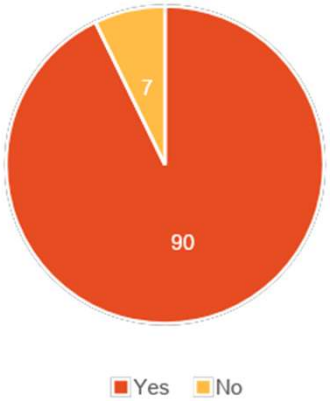
- Total of 97 responses



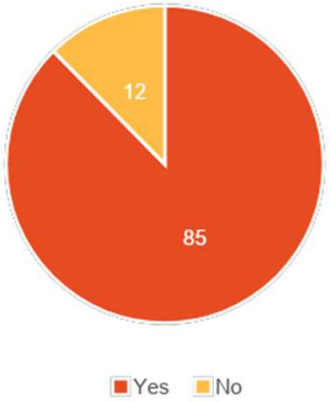


KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF SEARCH FILTERS

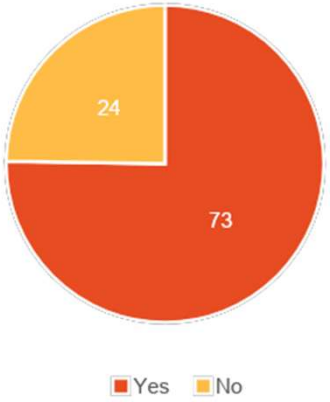
Know or heard of topic search filters



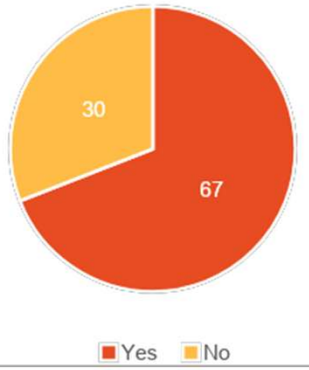
Know or heard of methodological search filters



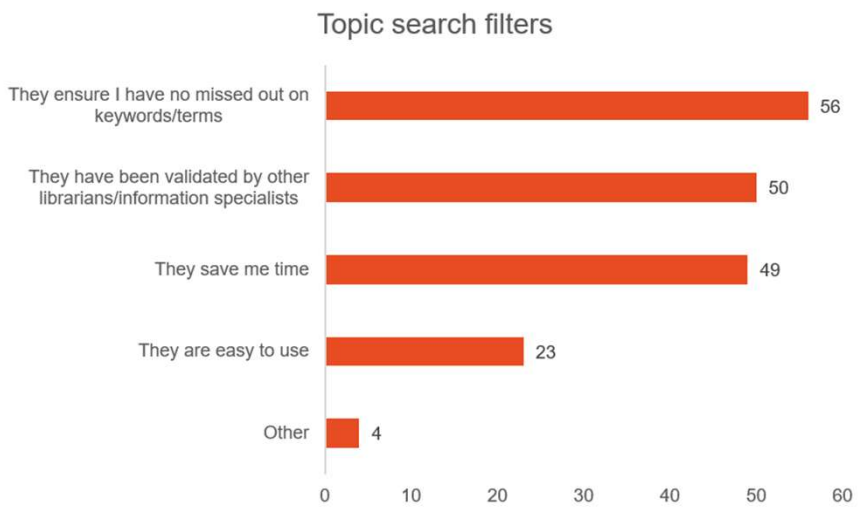
Used topic search filters in your work

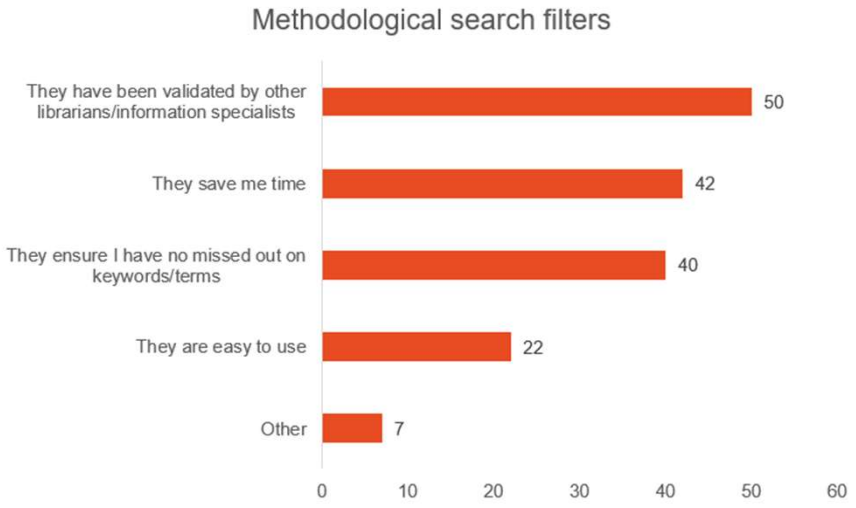


Used methodological search filters in your work



WHY LIBRARIANS USE SEARCH FILTERS

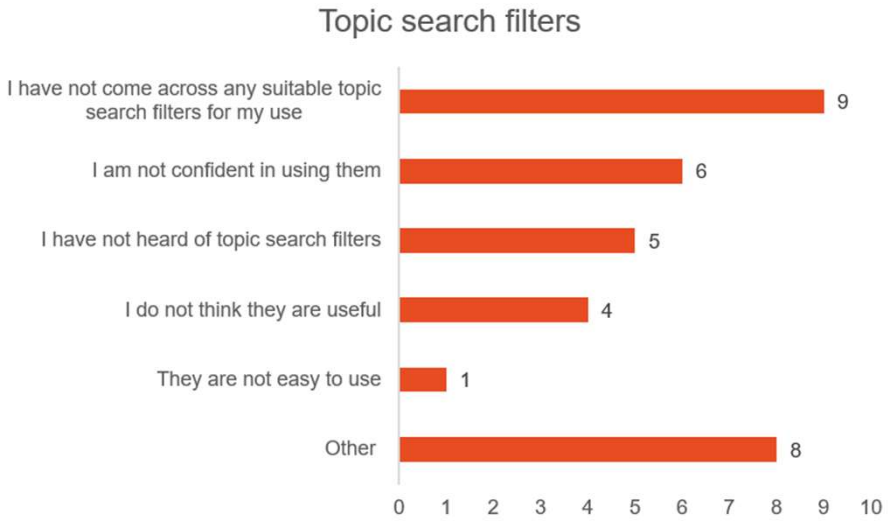


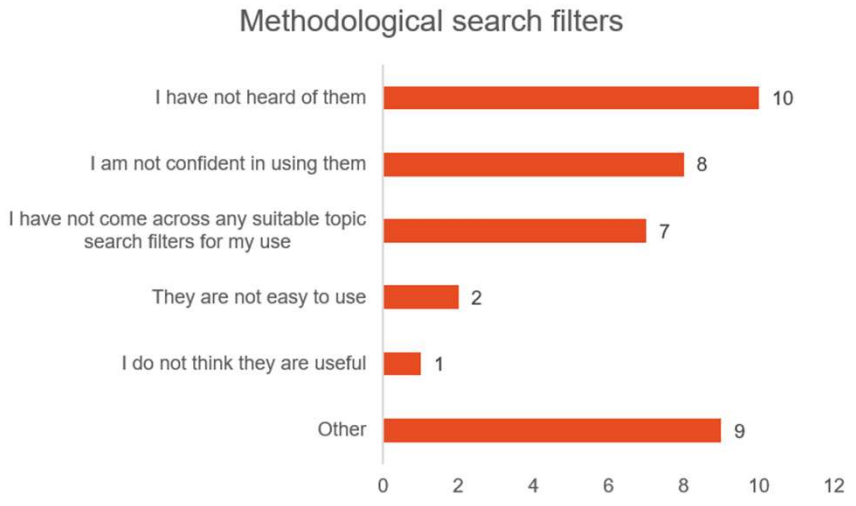


Other reasons (in no order):

- Deliver targeted/relevant results, cut down on the number of results retrieved
- A rationale is provided for using particular search terms
- As brainstorming for the language used on a topic (referring to topic search filters)
- Routinely used as search strategy design for review projects
- Trying new things
- Will use methodological search filters if the review topic is genuinely limited to a methodology

WHY LIBRARIANS DON'T USE FILTERS





Other reasons:

- Work is too specialised for filters
- Prefer to develop own search strategies
- Have not made the effort to search for relevant filters
- Search filters not necessary/not needed
- Looking for greater specificity in searches/search filters are broader than the requests received
- Don't think about search filters
- Requests are general/not clinical. Search filters more suited to scoping or systematic reviews

COMPETENCY IN USING SEARCH FILTERS (FREE TEXT QUESTION)

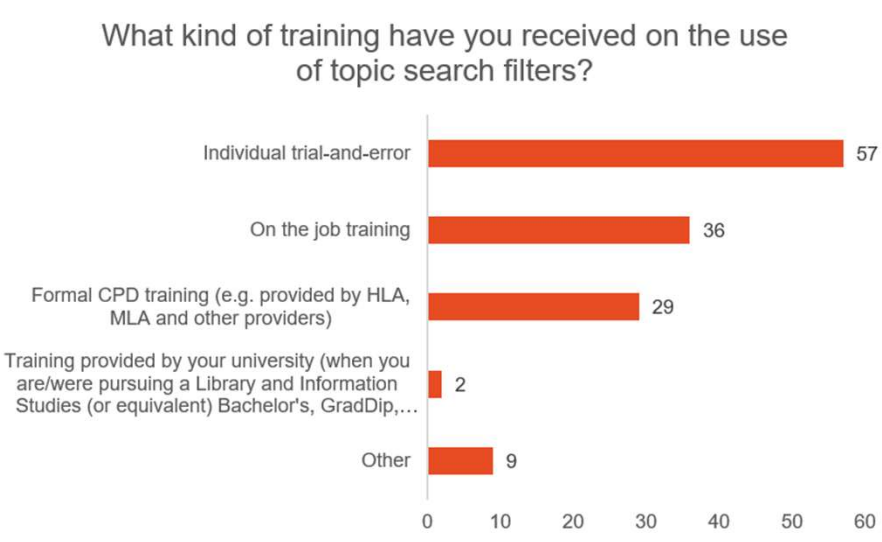
Competent because…

- Experience
  - Have experience but there's always more to learn
  - Know where to find them or use them regularly
  - Have experience in using search filters as is (copy/paste), but not in evaluating
  - Have created/validated search filters
  - Published papers using search filters
- Professional Development
  - Have attended training

Not competent because…

- Experience
  - Do not feel that they have enough experience
  - Do not use them often enough / Use regularly but not an "expert"
  - Not sure if choosing the most appropriate/comprehensive filter (too many to choose from)
  - "Don't know what I don't know"
- Professional development
  - Area of PD or not of interest to the health librarian
  - Attended training but have not had a chance to use them
- Time
  - Do not use them all the time
  - Do not have the time / Do not keep up with search filters
  - Sometimes forget about their existence

TRAINING





Other kinds of training:

- Advanced searching courses
- Discussions at conferences, with peers/colleagues
- Listservs, social media, working groups, Communities of Practice
- Carol Lefebre and Julie Glanville's courses, AEBPLI
- Reading journal articles, vendor training, participating in Cochrane Crowd, no training received

WAS THE TRAINING USEFUL?

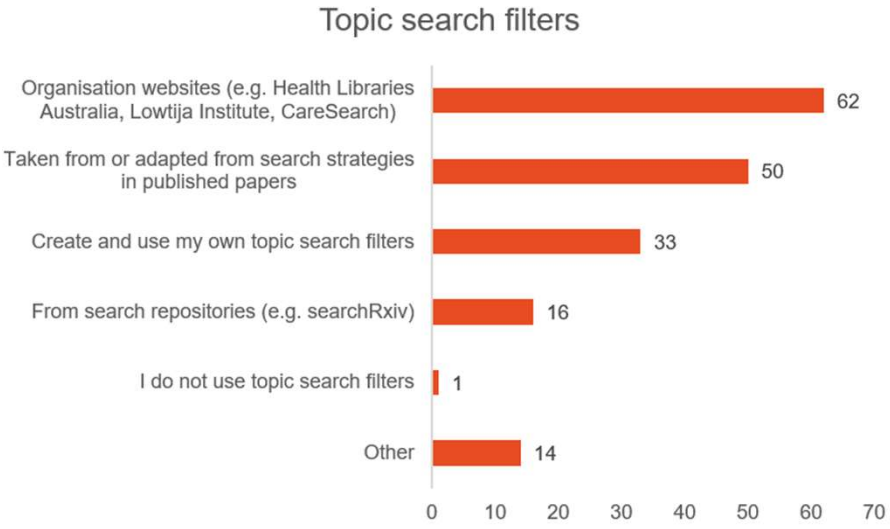
YES

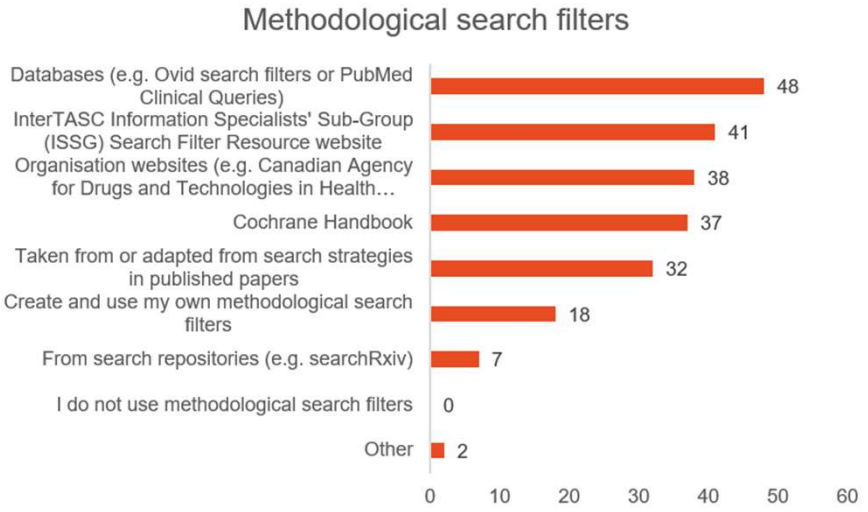
- Increased awareness of the variety of search filters but
- Increased understanding of and competence in when to use search filters and why search filters are used
- Training does not replace day-to-day learning/application
- Search filters are used so infrequently that you forget your training by the time you need to use them
- Peer training most useful
- Some training better than no training
- Shoutout to Carol Lefebre, Julie Glanville, Raechel Damarell, Justin Clark & Wichor Bramer.

NO

- Helpful to a certain extent – finer nuances of search filters are hard to be trained on
- Own trial-and-error & peer feedback most helpful
- Yes & no. Some respondents felt the training was about raising awareness rather than how to use it.
- Published search filters also have errors
- Further training needed
    - Still do not understand
    - Some training is for beginners

WHERE TO FIND SEARCH FILTERS





Other places to find search filters:

- ISSG website (for topic search filters)
- Team repository of search hedges
- Asking other librarians, listservs, social media
- Ovid Medline: Focused Searches

MORE OR LESS LIKELY TO TEACH SEARCH FILTERS

MORE LIKELY

- Depends on whether the question requires a search filter
- If there is an appropriate filter for the question
- If the user has understood the basics of searching
- If the search is for systematic review/evidence synthesis
- Search filters save time (users are time poor)
- Search filters reduce the number of results
- Search filters get better results or reduce risk of missing terms

LESS LIKELY

- Not everyone's search requires a search filter
- Too advanced for some cohorts such as students or clinicians
- Not enough time for training – focus on other search skills more than search filters
- Methodological search filters are less accurate and helpful compared to topic search filters

Note: Responses are listed in no particular order

CLOSING

- Part 1: Quantitative survey
  (BIG thank you to all who have completed the survey!)

- Part 2: One-to-one qualitative interviews (online or in-person) to gather information/best practices on how health librarians use and teach search filters
  - If you would like to share your views please contact me: eunice.ang@nh.org.au
  - This work should begin sometime in 2027…

Thank you to Health Libraries Australia and everyone who helped along the way ☺