

## What is a PICOT question?

The PICOT question is a consistent “formula” for developing answerable, searchable questions that result in an effective literature search that yields the best, most relevant information.



PICOT is an acronym of the following:

<b>P</b>	<p><b>Patient/Population/Problem:</b></p> <p><b>Patients/population:</b> Consider age, gender, and diagnosis.</p> <p><b>Problem:</b> Consider environment of care (e.g., infection control), work environment (e.g., staffing, clinical well-being), and variations in practice (e.g., vascular access device flushing, fall assessment).</p>
<b>I</b>	<p><b>Intervention/Issue:</b></p> <p><b>Intervention:</b> Consider medications, treatments, and education.</p> <p><b>Issue:</b> Consider work environment or specialty consultation</p>
<b>C</b>	<p><b>Comparison:</b> Consider another intervention or no intervention, as well as current practice.</p>
<b>O</b>	<p><b>Outcome:</b> Consider the expected outcome of therapy or other interventions, the rate of adverse events, and toxicity.</p>
<b>T</b>	<p><b>Time frame:</b> Consider the unit of time (e.g., days, weeks, months) during hospitalization or the clinic visit.</p>

## PICOT best practices

- Depending on your question, you may or may not have a comparison or time frame (the "C" and "T" in PICOT, respectively).
- Remember that PICOT questions will direct your literature search and should be specific, searchable, and nonbiased.
- Your PICOT question is NOT your project. It is a starting point to structure the next steps.
- PICOT questions never have directional terms, such as “improve” or “decrease.”
- Using a template will help you compose well-written PICOT questions.

## Examples of PICOT questions

Type of question	General question	PICOT template	PICOT question example
Intervention	Which treatment leads to the best outcome?	In _____ (P) how does _____ (I) compared to _____ (C) affect _____ (O) within _____ (T)	In patients with head and neck cancer undergoing radiation therapy, how does magic mouthwash compared to viscous lidocaine affect pain from mucositis within two weeks of onset of symptoms?
Etiology/harm	What are the risk factors that cause a condition?	Are _____ (P) who have _____ (I) compared with those without _____ (C) at risk for/of _____ (O) over _____ (T)	Are patients with breast cancer experiencing hot flashes who have antidepressants prescribed "compared with those not prescribed antidepressants" at risk for side effects, such as nausea, fatigue, dry mouth, and appetite changes?
Diagnostic	Which test is more accurate in diagnosing a condition?	In _____ (P) are/is _____ (I) compared with _____ (C) more accurate in diagnosing _____ (O)	In a patient who has a COVID-19 exposure, is the rapid antigen test, compared to the polymerase chain reaction test, more accurate in diagnosing COVID-19?
Prognostic/prediction	What is the clinical course over time, or what are the complications of a condition?	In _____ (P) how does _____ (I) compared to _____ (C) influence _____ (O) over _____ (T)	In men with a new diagnosis of prostate cancer, how does surgery "compared to radiation therapy" influence sexual function?
Meaning	What is the meaning of an experience for an individual, group, or community?	How do _____ (P) with _____ (I) perceive _____ (C) during _____ (O)	How do men with hot flashes perceive sleep disturbances during hormonal therapy treatment?

## Applying the PICOT template

Using the examples above, write your clinical question(s) in the PICOT format.