

Systematic reviews & evidence syntheses

Planning the search



Searching for studies
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Plan for today

- Use “systematic review” to cover a range of evidence syntheses that take a systematic approach
- Take you through the theory underpinning the search process
- From question formulation to documenting your search



What is a systematic review?

A systematic review attempts to **identify, appraise and synthesize all the empirical evidence** ...to answer a specific research question... use **explicit, systematic methods** that are selected with a view aimed at minimizing bias...

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/about/about-cochrane-reviews>



Literature reviews vs. systematic reviews

No protocol	Pre-defined protocol
General question	Focused question
Brief details of main keywords	Fully reproducible & detailed search strategy
Searches 1 or 2 sources	Searches across multiple sources
Includes known literature	Searches for unpublished or 'grey' literature
No specific criteria for inclusion & exclusion	Pre-specified inclusion & exclusion criteria
No search documentation	Search documentation

Do you need to do a systematic review?

- Would a literature review with a systematic approach to searching be sufficient?
- If no, make sure you choose the right type of “systematic review” for your question?



Types of “systematic review”

- Systematic review of:
 - Intervention studies, diagnostic studies, prognostic studies, qualitative studies, economic evaluations, IPD...
- Mixed methods & realist reviews
- Rapid reviews
- Scoping reviews
- Systematic overviews



Common approach to searching

- Formulate a question
- Run a scoping search
 - Identify existing reviews
 - Develop a search strategy
- Run the search across multiple databases
- Use additional search methods to identify unpublished “grey” literature
- Manage & screen results
- Document the search



Next steps

- Do you have a research question?
- Will a systematic review help you answer it?

