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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Literature review</th>
<th>Systematic review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No protocol</td>
<td>No protocol</td>
<td>Pre-defined protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General question</td>
<td>General question</td>
<td>Focused question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief details of main keywords</td>
<td>Brief details of main keywords</td>
<td>Fully reproducible &amp; detailed search strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searches 1 or 2 sources</td>
<td>Searches 1 or 2 sources</td>
<td>Searches across multiple sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes known literature</td>
<td>Includes known literature</td>
<td>Searches for unpublished or ‘grey’ literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No specific criteria for inclusion &amp; exclusion</td>
<td>No specific criteria for inclusion &amp; exclusion</td>
<td>Pre-specified inclusion &amp; exclusion criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>No search documentation</td>
<td>No search documentation</td>
<td>Search documentation</td>
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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?