Systematic or evidence-based literature reviews use explicit and transparent methods.

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- Reduction of bias
- Provision of comprehensive body of knowledge

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What is the overall aim?

Follow a standard protocol, or a set series of stages

- Reduction of bias
- Provision of comprehensive body of knowledge

Related to this: Scoping – a summary of a topic as prelude to further research.

- Reducing the bias
- Provision of comprehensive body of knowledge

Understanding search terms – what is the question?

Consider your question, starting with keywords: the words and phrases for use in search engines and databases.

Use all databases relevant to your subject area:

- Journals
- Websites

Evaluation

You are now drowning in abstracts!

So:

Q: How do you create a pool in which you can swim comfortably through abstracts towards those that are relevant?

A: Establish filters which can be:

- Global – metadata based. This means that material will be in or out depending on author, year of publication, etc. Also in the sense of geography – omitting or only including certain parts of the world.

Evidence-grading – based on quality, as determined by researchers e.g., non-peer reviewed material, opinion-based, rhetorical, and material with unclear conclusions might be sifted out.

Semantic – removes same terms which have a different meaning.

Accessibility – is the article available as a full text, rather than some truncated form?

Synthesis

You have your set of articles.

Rather than listing individual findings, how do you draw together common strands and show up apparent contradictions?

A table could be used with study references listed together with a brief overview of findings.

They could be:

- Statistical – results subjected to a set of statistical tests, i.e. meta-analysis
- Narrative – organized by themes, study type, etc.
- Conceptual – different concepts brought together and a new concept described

How to record the data?

This could be coded according to:

- General description
- Results
- Methods

Example

In a systematic review:

- Everything starts with keywords and search strings for relevant databases
- This results in a series of abstracts, which must be filtered to produce an objective and scientific selection
- Articles are then read and summarized.