Systematic Review Fact Sheet

Sources to search

This fact sheet is one of a series available that discusses systematic reviews, methodology, searching and sources. For research assistance contact the Flinders University Library.

Systematic review conventions

Systematic reviews require a comprehensive and reproducible search of a wide range of sources to identify as many relevant studies as possible. An exhaustive search process minimises the risk of biased reporting of results and thereby strengthens review validity.

The systematic review search should therefore:

- seek to identify unpublished as well as published studies

- be iteratively developed in one database and then accurately translated for all other databases

- include a search of the internet outside databases using a search engine such as Google

- be run just once and the retrieved citations taken offline into a reference management program such as EndNote. The date on which the search is run must be recorded as part of documenting the search strategy.

The selection of electronic databases and unpublished sources to search will depend upon the review topic. Your liaison librarian will have specialist knowledge in this area.

Beyond databases

In addition to searching databases, consider trying the following approaches to identifying studies:

- Grey literature

- Checking reference lists of relevant articles for other relevant studies (snowballing)

- Google searching using the Google Advanced search option for better results. Limit to filetype PDF to restrict results to documents, reports etc. rather than blogs and websites.

- Handsearching a select range of specialist journals and conference proceedings closely aligned with your topic of interest.

- Identifying experts in the field and contacting them for information about other studies or data.

Why hand search?

Handsearching is the process of manually checking the contents pages of journals, conference proceedings, and meeting abstracts for relevant studies. The main reasons for handsearching are:

- Some journal titles are not indexed in the major databases

- Some sections of journals (e.g. meeting abstracts) are not indexed

- Indexing is a fallible process. Citations can have the wrong subject headings assigned or relevant subject headings can be missed rendering a citation difficult to find via an electronic database search.

- To avoid relying completely on your search strategy.

Selecting which journals to handsearch can be done by analysing the results of the database searches to identify the journals that contain the largest number of relevant studies.

For more information on specific journals:

- JCR (Journal Citation Reports)

  Bibliometric citation data (inc. no. of articles, citations & impact factor) for more than 12,000 scholarly and technical journals and conference proceedings from more than 3,300 publishers in over 60 countries. Includes virtually all specialties in the areas of science, technology, and social sciences.

- Ulrichsweb.com

  Bibliographic and descriptive information on periodicals of all types: academic and scholarly journals, e-journals, peer-reviewed titles, popular magazines, newspapers, and newsletters.

Key subject-specific databases

Health databases

- ATSIHealth - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Bibliography (Informit)

  A bibliographic database that indexes published and unpublished material on Australian Indigenous health. Includes theses, government reports, conference papers, abstracts, books, statistical documents. Coverage: 1990 – present.

- CINAHL

  CINAHL is the authoritative resource for nursing and allied health professionals. This database indexes journals from the fields of nursing, biomedicine, alternative/complementary medicine, consumer health and 17 allied health disciplines. & consumer health . It also indexes healthcare books and dissertations.

- Health and Society (Informit)

  A bibliographic database that indexes and abstracts articles from published and unpublished material on research, policy and practice issues about, or of relevance to, Australian families. Coverage: 1980-present. Subject coverage includes: the health and well being of families and individuals; health policy; health services; quality of life, morbidity, mortality and life expectancy; mental health and illness; health issues of particular concern to the aged, children and youth; Aboriginal health; pregnancy, birth; ethical aspects of health such as those surrounding abortion, euthanasia and reproductive technologies; health education and promotion; health administration; and economic issues.

- MEDLINE (via Ovid)

  Provides access to citations from the international biomedicine & life sciences literature. In addition to content indexed with NLM's Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), this version of

Medline includes recently published content with the following NLM statuses: Epub Ahead of Print, In-Process & Other Non-Indexed Citations, Daily, Versions(R)

- Emcare (via Ovid)

Emcare provides evidence-based literature and the latest scientific advancements that support patient treatment in a wide variety of healthcare settings. Core topics include: nursing, nutrition & dietetics, physiotherapy & rehabilitation, critical & intensive care, geriatrics & palliative care, dermatology & wound care, healthcare management, obstetrics & gynaecology, public & occupational health.

- PubMed

Biomedical and health citations from MEDLINE, life science journals, and e-books. May include links to full-text content from PubMed Central and publishers. Coverage: 1946 to present.

Other subject-specific databases

- AgeLine

Focuses on the population aged 50+ and issues of aging. It is the premier source for the literature of social gerontology and includes aging-related content from the health sciences, psychology, sociology, social work, economics and public policy.

- ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center)

Covers educational-related literature from journal articles, conferences, meetings, government documents, theses, dissertations, reports, audiovisual media, bibliographies, directories, books and monographs. Includes adult, career & vocational education, counselling & personnel services, early childhood education, education management, handicapped & gifted children. Coverage: 1966-present. Database is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education to provide extensive access to education-related literature.

- PsycINFO

A bibliographic database providing abstracts and citations to the scholarly literature in the psychological, social, behavioral, and health sciences. Coverage: 1806 to present.

- Sociological Abstracts

Covers international literature of sociology and related disciplines in social and behavioral sciences. Can limit to peer reviewed.

Multidisciplinary databases

- Google Scholar

Search across many disciplines and sources for scholarly literature including articles, theses, books, abstracts and court opinions. Troubleshooting Google Scholar.

- Informit Search

Multidisciplinary content including health, engineering, business, education, law, humanities and social sciences. Searches 95 databases covering a wide range of topics including health, engineering, business, education, law, humanities and social sciences.Sourced from publishers, associations and peak professional bodies and aggregated in full text, bibliographic and media databases. Informit search help.

- ProQuest

A multidisciplinary database which includes coverage of arts, business, education, health, history, literature and language, science and technology and the social sciences. [ProQuest search help](#).

- [Scopus](#)

Scopus is an abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature including scientific journals, books and conference proceedings. Focus is on the fields of science, technology, medicine, social sciences, and arts and humanities. [Scopus search help](#).

- [Web of Science](#)

Web of Science is a multidisciplinary index to the journal literature of the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities. Web of Science searches the following indexes: Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), Conference Proceedings Citation Index- Science (CPCI-S), Conference Proceedings Citation Index- Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSH), Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), Current Chemical Reactions (CCR-EXPANDED), Index Chemicus (IC). [Web of Science search help](#).

Database tutorials

- [CINAHL: basic searching tutorial](#)
- [CINAHL: advanced searching tutorial](#)
- [Cochrane Library: an introduction](#)
- [Cochrane Library: search manual](#)
- [Cochrane Library: searching and using MeSH](#)
- [Informit Search Hints](#)
- [Introduction to Medline](#)
- [Introduction to PsycINFO](#)
- [How to use PubMed](#) (brief animated tutorials with audio for using PubMed
- [Use MeSH to build a better PubMed query](#) (animated tutorial on using Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) in PubMed - 3mins)
- [Scopus tutorial: basic search](#)
- [Web of Science quick reference card](#)
- [Web of Science: video tutorials](#)

Team:	College & Research Library Services
Subject:	Systematic Reviews
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Last Updated:	4 November 2020

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