Rutgers Biomedical Health Sciences (RBHS) Libraries
Systematic Review Service Requirements

Faculty or Staff Members Getting Ready:
Are you prepared to meet with a Librarian to discuss your systematic review?

What is your research question?

The librarian will need a short description of the question or topic you plan to address in your review. To assist the librarian in developing the best possible search strategy, plan to discuss your reason for addressing the research question through a systematic review, existing literature on the topic, and possible terminology to include in the search.

Have you determined that there are no existing systematic reviews or systematic review protocols that address your question?

Before starting your project, it is important to verify whether someone has previously addressed the research question in a review. A librarian can complete a thorough search of databases and other resources (e.g. CRE’s Prospero, Joanna Briggs Institute, Cochrane, Campbell Collaboration) to ensure that you are not duplicating the work of others. Even if a systematic review already exists, you will want to assess the review’s quality and whether an update would be of value.

Do you have a FINAL protocol? Do you have a copy of your protocol?

Like any well-designed research study, a systematic review should begin with the development of a protocol (a detailed description of the objectives and methods of the review). A librarian can recommend resources on developing protocols, including existing standards and examples. The librarian can also assist in developing the section of the protocol that describes the literature search methodology. The literature search process is aided greatly by a written protocol.

Have you assembled a research team?

Many tasks in the systematic review process should be performed by more than one individual (e.g. screening search results) or require individuals with specialized skills (data analysis, literature searching). Sharing tasks also increases efficiency and reduces risk of error and bias. If you plan to do a meta-analysis, consider including a biostatistician on the review team. First-time review authors are encouraged to work with others who have previous experience with systematic reviews.
Do you plan to use EndNote, or another reference management tool, to manage the search results?

Literature searches for systematic reviews may produce thousands of records. Your ability to organize and manage these results will impact your ability to complete the systematic review. Librarians at the Rutgers Biomedical Health Sciences (RBHS) Libraries use EndNote to manage literature search results and recommend that you create an account specifically for your systematic review. We can try to work with your management system of choice.

Do you have time to screen the results of comprehensive literature searches?

Literature searches produce thousands of records that must be systematically and independently screened by research team members. Inclusion or exclusion criteria are usually decided upon by the research team prior to searching. The establishment of this criterion is fundamental to developing a rigorous search strategy while making the screening process more focused. The literature search results and the results of the screening process must themselves be thoroughly documented. Librarians can recommend tools and software designed to help with the screening process.

What is your timetable for the systematic review?

Like other types of studies, systematic reviews require substantial time to complete (8 months to one year is a realistic expectation). Establishing a timetable for your project will help the librarian develop a reasonable schedule for conducting searches and delivering results.

Have you considered where you would like to publish your systematic review?

Not all journals publish systematic reviews, and those that do may have submission criteria or author instructions that are specific to systematic reviews.

Are you familiar with existing standards for the design, conduct and reporting of systematic reviews?

If you are not familiar with standards for systematic reviews, we highly recommend that you take a look at the IOM Standards for Systematic Reviews and the PRISMA Statement.

Is this for a grant proposal?

If so, plan to include the librarian as a co-investigator or consultant in your proposal and discuss with him/her the appropriate allocation of effort.
Will the librarian be a co-author on the final manuscript?

A librarian who designs and conducts comprehensive literature searches for a systematic review makes a major scholarly contribution to that project. As such, the librarian should be included as a co-author on the primary manuscript that arises from the project. As a co-author, the librarian will be responsible for writing the section of the manuscript that describes the literature search methodology.

The 2011 Institute of Medicine Report states the following: (Standard 3.1)

**Standard 3.1 - Conduct a comprehensive systematic search for evidence**

- 3.1.1 Work with a librarian or other information specialist trained in performing systematic reviews to plan the search strategy
- 3.1.2 Design the search strategy to address each key research question
- 3.1.3 Use an independent librarian or other information specialist to peer review the search strategy

---
