

# Doing a Literature Review

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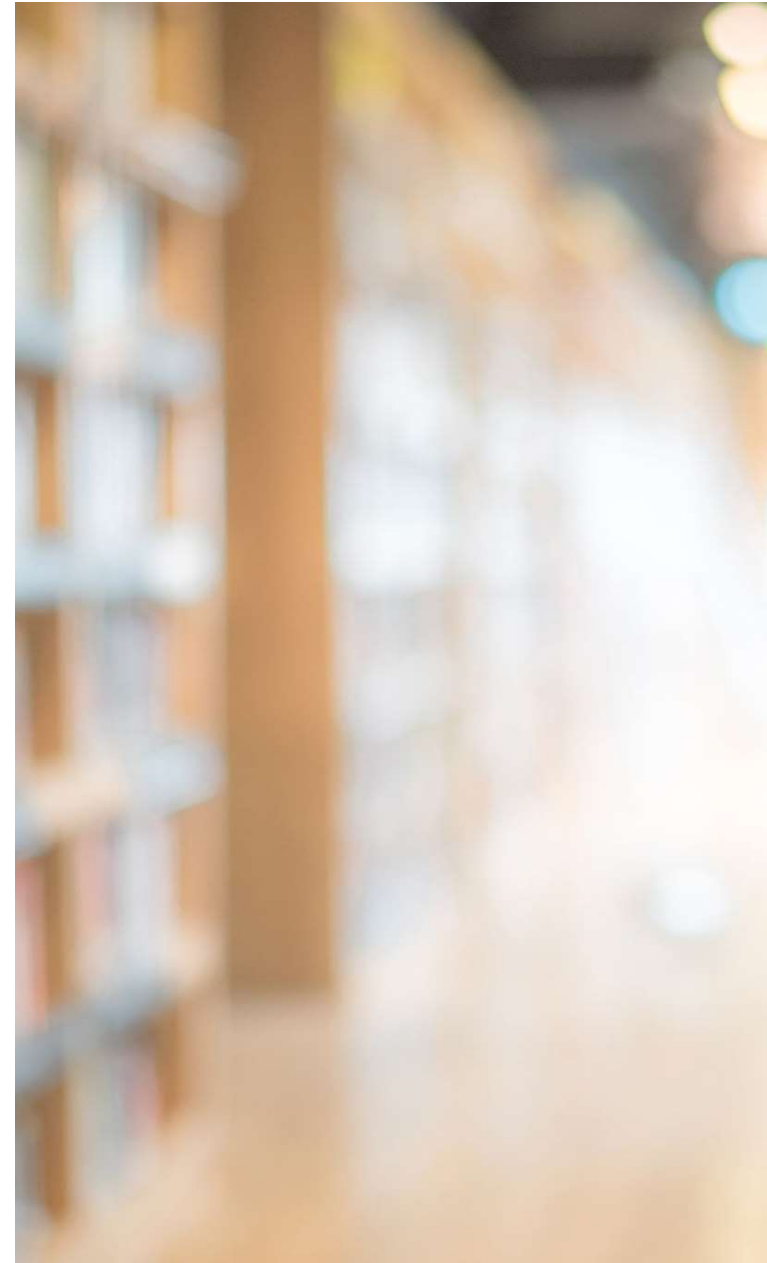
# Why Do a Literature Review?

- 1 Find out what is known about a theory or empirical research on specific issues.
- 2 To write the justification for applying for research funding.
- 3 To write the protocol for a research project to get ethics approval
- 4 To write a protocol for a research project for publication – transparent and quality of research.
- 5 To write a literature review for publication.
- 6 To write a political economy analysis, critical review of policies and /or laws.

Note: it may be necessary to do more than one literature review for any given research project.

# How do we find the literature?

- Library catalogues
- Search engines.
- Publishers' catalogues/  
Amazon.
- Research repositories  
– ResearchGate,  
Academia, Social  
Science Research  
Network.
- Hand searches.
- World Development  
Indicators, OECD  
Indicators, World Bank  
publications, UN  
publications,  
government web sites,  
statistical agencies etc.





# How Do We Carry Out a Literature Review?

- Purposive searches using key words to find relevant literature often limiting the search to the last five years.
- Systematic searches using search engines such as MEDLINE, Web of Science Core Collection, Google Scholar, IngentaConnect, and JSTOR using a predetermined list of key words.
- Hand Searches – searching for articles in the references of downloaded texts.

# What Do We Search For?



Peer Review  
Journal Articles



Academic Books –  
monographs and  
edited collections



Grey literature –  
any published  
literature including  
PhD thesis (and  
masters and  
undergraduate),  
research reports,  
working papers,  
preprints.



Statistical data



Laws, policies,  
strategies and  
other government  
documents



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## Types of Literature Reviews

- Narrative Reviews
- Scoping Reviews
- Systematic Reviews and Meta Analysis/Narrative Synthesis
- Realist Reviews
- Critical Realist Reviews
- Theory Reviews



# Narrative Review

- Purpose – usually to plan research, to inform research questions and demonstrate that the research will contribute to scholarly knowledge.
- Literature searched for can be theoretical, empirical, policies and laws or secondary data. Can limit searches to peer review publication and books published by reputable academic publishers, but not necessary. For empirical research a quality criteria is often used.
- Written up for research grant applications, protocols for ethics approval and for academic publications based on research findings.
- The main issues are that important literature may be missed and it is not replicable.
- Only way to search for laws, policies, official reports etc.
- Often the only way of finding theoretical literature

# Scoping Review

- The aim is to map out the research on a topic.
- Is often used for literature reviews for research proposals etc.
- Protocols for doing scoping reviews and the scoping reviews are often published in peer review journals in medicine and health sciences and some social science journals will publish them.
- There are published guidelines for carrying out scoping reviews and journals usually require that the review will be/has been carried out in accordance with these [ScR overview - Scoping Reviews - Guides at University of South Australia \(unisa.edu.au\)](https://unisa.edu.au/scoping-reviews) .
- Systematic searches using data bases are required. All types of literature can be included but the norm is to use some criteria and some researchers only include peer review journal articles.
- The review is replicable i.e another research could repeat the searchers etc. but systematic searches do not always (ever) identify all relevant literature.



# Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis/Narrative Synthesis

- Answers a research question(s). The aim is to produce new knowledge by reviewing and synthesising the findings from research on a specific topic.
- There are guidelines for carrying out systematic reviews that must be followed ([Home - Systematic Reviews - Guides at University of South Australia \(unisa.edu.au\)](https://www.unisa.edu.au/research/centres/centre-for-evidence-based-practice/))
- Most frequently used to synthesize finds from trials and the inclusion criteria may only permit the inclusion of randomised control trials. However, systematic reviews may include mixed methods and qualitative research.
- Uses a systematic search for literature and usually only articles from peer review journals are included.
- Sets a quality threshold that articles must meet to be included in the review and gives quality ratings to those that are included.
- Meta analysis combine the weighted effects sizes from the studies included in the review into an overall summary statistic (s) together with measures of variability and confidence intervals.
- Narrative synthesis uses thematic analysis to identify the main themes in the included studies and then compare and contrast them. The findings are interpreted, and conclusions are drawn. It is used for synthesising the findings from qualitative research and/or where the findings cannot be included in a meta-analysis
- The findings are usually published in a peer review journal article.
- Systematic reviews should be conducted in a rigorous and systematic way to give credibility to the findings and enable replication

# Realist/Critical Realist Synthesis

- Realist and critical realist reviews are comparable although there are some differences in theoretical assumptions and data analysis.
- They are most frequently used to research complex social interventions and understand how, under what circumstances and for whom the intervention works.
- They are theory building – the aim is to develop a middle range theory that theorises how, for whom and under what circumstances an intervention worked. The theory may be developed to be the programme theory for an intervention or to advise policy makers of how an intervention can be implemented so it works.
- Searches initially use the same approach as scoping reviews, but further iterative searches are carried out as the review progresses.
- Analysis is thematic and examines how context (structure) changes when the intervention is implemented and what the outcomes are. Critical realists emphasise agency more than realists arguing that it is agents using skills that they have acquired from the intervention to trigger mechanisms that lead to the outcomes. Change can be structural, cultural or individual.
- There are guidelines for carrying out a realist synthesis but, as yet there are no guidelines for carrying out critical realist synthesis. [RAMESES publication standards: realist syntheses | BMC Medicine | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#), [Realist Review - Knowledge Syntheses: A How-To Guide - LibGuides at Dalhousie University](#).
- Findings are synthesised to develop a middle range theory.

# Acknowledgments

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This research was funded by the NIHR (NIHR133712) using UK aid from the UK Government to support global health research. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the UK government, the Court of the University of Aberdeen, the Board of Directors of the University of Rwanda, the Board of Directors of Addis Ababa University, the Board of Directors of The Sanctuary, or our International Advisory Board.