What Type of Review Is Right for You?

Do you want to gather all the evidence on a particular research topic?

Yes

Do you have 3 or more people to work on the review?

Yes

Do you have 12–18 months to complete a review?

Yes

Do you have a broad topic or multiple research questions?

Yes

Do you want to review other published systematic reviews on your topic?

Yes

Umbrella Review

No

Rapid Review

No

Scoping Review

No

More intensive reviews usually require a multi-person team for unbiased article screening.

Do you have a well-formulated research question?

Yes

Systematic Review

Will you use statistical methods to objectively evaluate, synthesize, and summarize results?

Yes

Meta-Analysis

No

A meta-analysis will not be needed.

No

Systematic reviews are conducted in an unbiased, reproducible way to provide evidence for practice and policy-making and to identify gaps in research. They require a well-formulated research question.
Literature (Narrative) Review

A broad term referring to reviews with a wide scope and non-standardized methodology.

- Search strategies, comprehensiveness, and time range covered vary and do not follow an established protocol.

Rapid Review

Applies systematic review methodology within a time-constrained setting.

- Employs methodological “shortcuts” (limiting search terms for example) at the risk of introducing bias.
- Useful for addressing issues needing quick decisions.
- See Evidence summaries: the evolution of a rapid review approach for methodological guidance.

Scoping Review or Systematic Map

Systematically and transparently collects and categorizes existing evidence on a broad topic or set of research questions.

- Seeks to identify research gaps and opportunities for evidence synthesis.
- May critically evaluate existing evidence, but does not attempt to synthesize the results in the way a systematic review would.
- May take longer than a systematic review.
- See Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework for methodological guidance.
- See Environmental Evidence Journal Systematic Maps and Guidance on Systematic Maps—CIFOR.

Umbrella Review

Reviews other systematic reviews on a topic.

- Often defines a broader question than is typical of a traditional systematic review.
- Most useful when there are competing interventions to consider.

Systematic Review

A methodical and comprehensive literature synthesis focused on a well-formulated research question.

- Aims to identify and synthesize all of the scholarly research on a particular topic, including both published and unpublished studies.
- Conducted in an unbiased, reproducible way to provide evidence for practice and policy-making and to identify gaps in research.
- May involve a meta-analysis.
- Much more time-intensive than traditional literature reviews.

Meta-Analysis

A statistical technique for combining the findings from disparate quantitative studies.

- Uses statistical methods to objectively evaluate, synthesize, and summarize results.
- May be conducted independently or as part of a systematic review.