



Second Thing: Literature Reviews

Did you know that there are literature review families? Thing 2 is all about choosing the right review for your research question. Lindy Cochrane and Tania Celeste from the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (MDHS) and Faculty of Science library teams take you through the different types of reviews, and what to consider when selecting a review type.

Literature Reviews

There are a wide range of literature review types that are available for research synthesis for publication and research purposes. In this blog, we unpack some of the key considerations in choosing the best review type for your research project and introduce the concept of review families as demonstrated in the [‘Which Review is That? guide’](#)

Choose the right review type for your question

Selecting the appropriate review type begins with establishing your research question. Identifying whether your research question is broad/exploratory or specific/focused will help determine a suitable type of review.

Characteristics of research questions and suitable review types

- Systematic Review Family**
 For specific and focused research questions, consider a review type from the [systematic review family](#). Systematic reviews are ideal for answering focused research questions as they involve a rigorous and comprehensive search of the literature with explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria.

- Traditional Review Family**
 If your research question is complex and requires a range of perspectives, a review from the [traditional review family](#) may be suitable. These types of reviews provide a broad overview of the literature, highlighting key themes and concepts, and presenting a range of viewpoints.
- Purpose Specific Review**
 For broader and exploratory research questions an option from the [purpose specific review family](#) such as a scoping review may be more appropriate. Scoping reviews are useful for identifying research gaps and defining research questions in emerging areas of research.
- Review of Reviews Family**
 If your research question aims to conclusively determine evidence from a range of reviews that have differing findings, then an option from the [review of reviews family](#) such as a Review of Reviews or Umbrella Review would be suitable for your research.
- Qualitative Reviews Family**
 If your research question pertains to the process of reviewing qualitative studies, then it is likely that a review type from the [qualitative reviews family](#) may be most suited to your research. There is a large array of review types that are grouped within this family, which incorporates various methods of qualitative syntheses such as a meta-narrative review.
- Mixed Methods Review Family**
 If your research focus intends to address both quantitative and qualitative primary research as well as data into a single review, then a review from the [mixed methods review family](#) may be best suited.

Review processes

When selecting a review type, consider other key processes associated with each type.

These processes include:

- Search**
 Search strategy requirements will differ between reviews. Some types such as [scoping reviews](#) require a comprehensive search to exhaustively scan all the literature available, including grey literature resources ([find more about grey literature here](#)). Conversely, the extensiveness of the search can be determined by time constraints as suggested for a [rapid review](#).
- Appraisal**
 Requirements for quality assessment or appraisal differ between review types. Critical appraisal is an essential component for [systematic](#) and [mixed method reviews](#). There are recommended guidelines and critical appraisal tools that should be employed for these reviews. Other review types such as [scoping reviews](#) and [state of the art](#) reviews don't mandate formal quality assessment or appraisal and this process is optional.
- Synthesis**
 It is important to consider the nature of the data and the desired synthesis output when selecting a review type. The synthesis process focuses on integrating and summarising the findings across studies or sources. For example, [systematic reviews](#) aim for a comprehensive

and exhaustive synthesis of the available evidence. On the other hand, [scoping reviews](#) focus on mapping the literature and providing a broader overview. Furthermore, different approaches can also be employed when presenting synthesised information in reviews and these can be adapted or combined depending on the review type and the complexity of the data. The most common methods of synthesis output in reviews are narrative, graphical or tabular in the form of comparison or summary tables.

- **Analysis**

The analysis stage involves examining and interpreting the data collected from the included studies or sources to draw meaningful conclusions. Understanding the nature of the data required and the desired analytical approach is crucial in selecting an appropriate review type. The analysis conducted can take different forms such as chronological, conceptual, thematic, and so on. For example, a [qualitative review's](#) focus is on understanding the meaning, context, and patterns within the collected qualitative data. Conversely, a [critical review](#) involves a thorough examination and critique of the literature sources, methodologies, concepts, and arguments.

Ultimately, the choice of review type will depend on a variety of factors. It is important to carefully consider each of these when selecting an appropriate review type. This allows for the review to address the research question and to appraise, synthesise, and analyse the existing evidence in a meaningful way that fulfills the overall research purpose.

For more information about the different types of reviews, [click here to see our library guide to literature reviews](#).

For more information about review processes, [click here to see the review comparison chart](#).

About the authors

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Both are authors of the '[Which Review is that?](#)' library guide and are co-authors of numerous published systematic and scoping reviews in the health sciences. They are highly skilled in supporting researchers with a variety of review types, with many years of experience between them.

Featured image credit: Graphic from 'Which Review is That? – A guide to review types' University of Melbourne Library guide, <https://unimelb.libguides.com/whichreview>