

# Template for a Systematic Literature Review Protocol

## 1. Change Record

This should be a list or table summarizing the main updates and changes embodied in each version of the protocol and (where appropriate), the reasons for these.

## 2. Background

- a) explain why there is a need for a study on this topic
- b) specify the main research question being addressed by this study
- c) specify any additional research questions that will be addressed
- d) if extending previous research on the topic, explain why a new study is needed

## 3. Search Strategy

- a) specify and justify basic strategy: manual search, automated search, or mixed
- b) for automated searches, specify search terms and compounds of these (and record results of any prototyping of the search strings)
- c) for automated searches, identify resources to be used (digital libraries and search engines)
- d) for manual searches, identify the journals and conferences to be searched
- e) specify the time period to be covered by the review and any reasons for your choice
- f) identify any ancillary search procedures, e.g. asking leading researchers or research groups, or accessing their web sites; or checking reference lists of primary studies
- g) specify how the search process is to be evaluated (e.g. against a known subset of papers; or against the results from a previous systematic review)

## 4. Selection Criteria

- a) identify the *inclusion* criteria for primary studies
- b) identify the *exclusion* criteria
- c) define how selection will be undertaken (roles of analysts)
- d) define how agreement among analysts will be evaluated
- e) define how any differences between analysts will be resolved

## 5. Study Quality Assessment

- a) specify the quality checklists to be used
- b) specify how the checklist will be evaluated
- c) define how agreement among data extractors will be evaluated
- d) define how any differences between data extractors will be resolved
- e) identify the procedures to use for applying the checklists (e.g. details inclusion/exclusion; partitioning the primary studies during aggregation or meta-analysis; explaining the results of primary studies)

## 6. Data Extraction

- a) design data extraction form (and check via a dry run)
- b) specify the strategy for extracting the data and the form (paper, on-line etc.)
- c) identify how the data extraction process is to be undertaken and validated, particularly any data that require numerical calculations, or are subjective

**7. Synthesis**

- a) specify the form of analysis to be used (e.g. narrative, tabulation, meta-analysis)
- b) assess the threats to validity (construct, internal, external), particularly constraints on the search process and deviations from standard practice

**8. Study Limitations**

Specify residual validity issues including potential conflicts of interest (i.e. that are inherent in the context of the study, rather than arising from the plan).

**9. Reporting**

Identify target audience, relationship to other studies, planned publications, authors of the publications.

**10. Schedule**

Provide time estimates for all of the major steps.