

# Library Ask & Learn

## Literature Review A-Z Guide

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There are lots of different types of literature review. Sometimes the vocabulary can be confusing and even misapplied. The kind of review that you undertake may be influenced by your field of study. Different types of review may be defined by:

- aims of the review
- scope of the literature search
- scientific rigour and reporting of methods
- level of quality appraisal
- analysis and synthesis

See below for definitions (this not an exhaustive list) and links to useful resources:

**Annotated bibliography:** aims to provide an account of the literature available on a given topic. It is an organised list, often alphabetical, and may include books, research articles, primary documents, websites and other types of source. The scope of the literature search will be influenced by the author's level of topic expertise, the intended audience and the objectives of creating the bibliography. An annotated bibliography does not include a detailed description of the search methods employed by the author. In addition to bibliographic data, an annotated bibliography provides a concise summary of each source and some assessment of its value or relevance. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hall have produced a useful [guide](#).

**Best evidence topic (BET):** a modified CAT (see below) that aims to provide rapid evidence-based answers to real-life clinical questions specifically in emergency medicine. BETs use a systematic approach to reviewing the literature and allow for inclusion of lower quality literature. The literature search methods should be reported and the limitations of the research explicitly stated. BETs include a clinical "bottom line" to help practicing physicians make informed judgments. Examples of completed BETs are available on the [BestBETs website](#).

**Critically appraised topic (CAT):** aims to provide a short summary of the best research evidence on a topic usually focused around a clinical question. A CAT is like a shorter and less rigorous version of a [systematic review](#) and the search methods should be reported. Sound methodology and research design are key inclusion criteria. The strengths and weaknesses of included papers are identified. CATs also include a clinical "bottom line".

**Historical review (historiography):** aims to track the evolution of a topic in the scholarly literature. It may include many different types of sources including primary documents, books, websites and more. The main theories, ideas, major formative works and key authors should all be identified and critically analysed with reference to economic, social and political contexts. Although the search methods should be thorough and in line with the scope of the review it is unlikely they will need to be documented. An historical review may be presented alone or as part of a larger work. Directions for future research should also be discussed. Elihu Burritt Library at the Central Connecticut State University has produced a helpful [video](#) explaining the defining characteristics of an historical review.

**Meta-analysis:** uses statistical methods and techniques to analyse and integrate the data derived from a systematic review to produce a meta-analysis. Search methods are clearly reported as part of the systematic review process. Results are synthesised and presented in an impartial manner for publication and to support evidence based practice.

**Rapid evidence assessment (rapid review):** aims to use some systematic review methods to search for and appraise the evidence on a topic with certain limitations. Search methods are clearly reported and the weaknesses of the methodology acknowledged. Constraints on the search may include time, the number of key resources or databases searched, type of evidence included and experience of the reviewers. Evidence must be synthesized and critically appraised and is often presented for decision or policy making purposes. For this reason this type of review is often used in the [civil service](#).

**Scoping review:** aims to assess the volume and scope of research available on a topic. This may begin with a broad and loosely defined search to clarify key concepts in the literature, identify gaps and opportunities for future research. Unlike a systematic review this will require multiple structured electronic searches and other techniques such as hand searching important journals in the field. A scoping review typically collates and presents the research available without synthesis or quality appraisal. It may be conducted as a standalone piece of work or as a precursor to a systematic review. The Cochrane Library has produced a useful [video](#) on doing a scoping review.

**Systematic Review:** a high quality systematic review identifies, evaluates, analyses and interprets research evidence to answer a clearly defined and answerable research question. Systematic reviews differ from traditional reviews and commentaries in that they adhere to a scientific methodology that is reproducible and which seeks to minimise bias and errors. There are a number of international organisations that prepare, maintain and disseminate systematic reviews including: [The Cochrane Collaboration](#); [The Campbell Collaboration](#); [The Joanna Briggs Institute](#). The library also provides further guidance on [systematic review](#).