

Book Review

Systematic Approaches to a Successful Literature Review

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As a university librarian with particular responsibility for supporting, among others, the educational psychology training course, I am very aware of the difficulties posed by producing a high-quality systematic review of the literature. Now in its second edition, *Systematic Approaches to a Successful Literature Review* goes a long way towards alleviating some of the stresses and concerns caused by the process. Aimed at both students and researchers, it breaks down each element of the review process across ten comprehensive chapters, covering everything from review methods to effective dissemination. The clear layout makes it easy to follow for the newcomer and user-friendly for the more experienced researcher seeking a refresher on the process.

Written by two Chartered Members of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) (Booth and Sutton) and an experienced systematic reviewer (Papaioannou), the authors' expertise in these areas and clarity of writing make the text particularly easy to follow. As well as a clear breakdown of chapters into the individual elements of the review process, a glossary of key terms, clear learning objectives at the start of each chapter and examples for readers to work through all ensure the text is well structured and readable (it also includes a companion website, which provides a variety of additional resources, including exercises to support learning).

The book provides a clear overview of the many different types of review that may be undertaken, including critical, integrative, literature, meta-analysis and scoping review. Each type of review is clearly outlined with a description and characterised using the four steps outlined by Grant and Booth (2009): Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis (SALSA). Although the authors emphasise that a gold-standard systematic review as endorsed by the Cochrane Collaboration ensures the most "exhaustive search of the literature", this overview enables the reader to identify the requirements of alternative approaches.

When explaining the literature searching process in chapter 6, the authors give a clear explanation of each of the stages of the searching process, outlining a variety of strategies the researcher should consider. Introducing the concept of a scoping search, the authors outline some of the key databases that may be interrogated in a variety of subject areas, from the social sciences to library and information sciences to psychology. Grey literature is also covered, with a number of resources suggested to obtain materials such as conference abstracts and theses.

A variety of search strategies is covered by the authors including pearl-growing, free-text searching, thesaurus searching (using the controlled vocabulary available on an electronic database such as PsycInfo), citation searching and snowballing. The authors particularly recommend a combination of free text and thesaurus searching as an "optimally exhaustive search strategy", noting also that citation searching can often identify papers missed in the main search.

Booth *et al.* also offer guidance on the process of assessing the relevance of the studies found during the search stage, talking the reader through the selection process, an explanation of the features of an experimental study design (e.g., prospective versus retrospective), the completion of a quality assessment and separate chapters on analysing quantitative and qualitative studies. The book closes with a chapter on writing, presenting and disseminating the review, guiding the reader on writing for the research community, the media and the public. Despite its widespread use and benefits in its use, however, social media merits only a passing mention in the FAQs at the end of the chapter, in reference to creating greater impact for the systematic review. Likewise, despite the benefits in terms of broadening access, Open Access publishing has not been highlighted as an option to facilitate wider dissemination of systematic reviews.

Overall, however, this is an excellent and well-structured introduction to the process of conducting a successful systematic literature review. Whether the reader is new to systematic literature reviews or whether they simply require a refresher on some of the key elements of the process, this book provides a clearly written overview of the various steps in the process. Filled with suggestions for further reading and with extensive references, Booth, Sutton and Papaioannou offer a comprehensive and essential guide to the crucial process of conducting a systematic literature review.

References

Grant, M. J., & Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: An analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 26(2), 91–108. doi:10.1111/j.1471-1842.2009.00848.x

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