



10 questions to help you make sense of a review

How to use this appraisal tool

Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising the report of a systematic review:

- **Are the results of the review valid?** (Section A)
- **What are the results?** (Section B)
- **Will the results help locally?** (Section C)

The 10 questions on the following pages are designed to help you think about these issues systematically.

The first two questions are screening questions and can be answered quickly. If the answer to both is “yes”, it is worth proceeding with the remaining questions.

There is some degree of overlap between the questions, you are asked to record a “yes”, “no” or “can’t tell” to most of the questions. A number of prompts are given after each question. These are designed to remind you why the question is important. Record your reasons for your answers in the spaces provided.

There will not be time in the small groups to answer them all in detail!

(A) Are the results of the review valid?

Screening Questions

1. Did the review address a clearly focused question?

Yes

Can't tell

No

HINT: An issue can be 'focused' In terms of

- The population studied
- The intervention given
- The outcome considered

2. Did the authors look for the right type of papers?

Yes

Can't tell

No

HINT: 'The best sort of studies' would

- Address the reviews question
- Have an appropriate study design (usually RCTs for papers evaluating interventions)

Is it worth continuing?



Detailed questions

3. Do you think the important, relevant studies were included?

Yes Can't tell No

HINT: Look for

- Which bibliographic databases were used
 - Follow up from reference lists
 - Personal contact with experts
 - Search for unpublished as well as published studies
 - Search for non-English language studies
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4. Did the review's authors do enough to assess the quality of the included studies?

Yes Can't tell No

HINT: The authors need to consider the rigour of the studies they have identified. Lack of rigour may affect the studies' results. ("All that glisters is not gold" Merchant of Venice – Act II Scene?)

5. If the results of the review have been combined, was it reasonable to do so?

Yes Can't tell No

HINT: Consider whether

- The results were similar from study to study
- The results of all the included studies are clearly displayed
- The results of the different studies are similar
- The reasons for any variations in results are discussed

(B) What are the results?

6. What are the overall results of the review?

HINT: Consider

- If you are clear about the review's 'bottom line' results
 - What these are (numerically if appropriate)
 - How were the results expressed (NNT, odds ratio etc)
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7. How precise are the results?

HINT: Look at the confidence intervals, if given

(C) Will the results help locally?

8. Can the results be applied to the local population?

Yes

Can't tell

No

HINT: Consider whether

- The patients covered by the review could be sufficiently different to your population to cause concern
- Your local setting is likely to differ much from that of the review

9. Were all important outcomes considered?

Yes

Can't tell

No

HINT: Consider whether

- Is there other information you would like to have seen

10. Are the benefits worth the harms and costs?

Yes

Can't tell

No

HINT: Consider

- Even if this is not addressed by the review, what do you think?

