

10 Questions to Help You Make Sense of Reviews

How to Use This Appraisal Tool

- Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising the report of a systematic review:
 - Is the study valid?
 - What are the results?
 - Will the results help locally?
- 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.
- You are asked to record a “yes”, “no” or “can’t tell” to most of the questions. A number of italicised 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.

Screening Questions

1. Did the review ask a clearly-focused question?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider if the question is 'focused' in terms of:

- the population studied
- the intervention given or exposure
- the outcomes considered

2. Did the review include the right type of study?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider if the included studies:

- address the review's question
- have an appropriate study design

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

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider whether:

- the results of each study are clearly displayed
- the results were similar from study to study (look for tests of heterogeneity)
- the reasons for any variations in results are discussed

6. How are the results presented and what is the main result?

HINT: Consider:

- how the results are expressed (e.g. odds ratio, relative risk, etc.)
- how large this size of result is and how meaningful it is
- how you would sum up the bottom-line result of the review in one sentence

Is it worth continuing?

Detailed Questions

3. Did the reviewers try to identify all relevant studies?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider:

- which bibliographic databases were used
- if there was follow-up from reference lists
- if there was personal contact with experts
- if the reviewers searched for unpublished studies
- if the reviewers searched for non-English-language studies

4. Did the reviewers assess the quality of the included studies?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider:

- if a clear, pre-determined strategy was used to determine which studies were included. Look for:
 - a scoring system
 - more than one assessor

7. How precise are these results?

HINT: Consider:

- if a confidence interval were reported. Would your decision about whether or not to use this intervention be the same at the upper confidence limit as at the lower confidence limit?
- if a p-value is reported where confidence intervals are unavailable

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

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider whether:

- the population sample covered by the review could be different from your population in ways that would produce different results
- your local setting differs much from that of the review
- you can provide the same intervention in your setting

9. Were all important outcomes considered?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider outcomes from the point of view of the:

- individual
- policy makers and professionals
- family/carers
- wider community

10. Should policy or practice change as a result of the evidence contained in this review?

Yes Can't Tell No

HINT: Consider:

- whether any benefit reported outweighs any harm and/or cost. If this information is not reported can it be filled in from elsewhere?