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A Guide for Students and Staff (Thinking of) Doing Systematic Reviews

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More and more students on a variety of higher education courses are performing systematic reviews as part of their independent research, and it is becoming more common for research students to undertake a systematic review as part of their thesis or dissertation.

Although plenty of guidance is available in the form of books, paper collections and online advice, the majority of currently available sources are aimed at health care practitioners and researchers rather than students in general. Writing for students requires a clear narrative and a more accessible writing style, this gap was addressed by the first edition of this book published in 2014. However, systematic review as a method of research has evolved rapidly, and expanded into more and more fields. The publication of a second edition, with a new student-friendly 10-step roadmap, more comprehensive coverage of qualitative systematic reviews and a chapter on disseminating review findings was justified. In addition, in line with many other student-focused textbooks, the new edition is now supported by online resources which aid in understanding the systematic review process.

Starting with an introduction to carrying out a systematic review as a student, the authors cover the whole process from planning and defining the question, to data synthesis and writing a discussion. In addition, chapters on specific aspects of reviewing qualitative and economic evidence and guidance on the dissemination of reviews makes this a well-rounded textbook.

The strongest feature of this book is its use of clear examples supported by “frequently asked questions” sections. The combination of these approaches allows for a very unthreatening journey that is the production of a systematic review. Most, if not all, common questions received by supervisors from students undertaking systematic review projects have been addressed, which will make students more confident when discussing their work with supervisors. Furthermore, the student-friendly language of this book makes for engaging reading. The authors have chosen to address the reader throughout the book, rather than opting for a more neutral writing style. Keeping in mind the target audience and the aim of the book, this style helps maintain the reader’s interest (Treagust and Harrison, 1999).

A possible improvement to this book would be a more thorough introduction to realist reviews. Where in many cases systematic reviews are the most appropriate way forward for knowledge synthesis, the complex areas of evidence-based policy making and social interventions calls for a more “realist approach” to evaluation (Pawson *et al.*, 2005). However, as realist synthesis warrants a book in its own right, and is possibly not appropriate for master’s level research, this gap is forgivable and does not diminish the contribution that *Doing a Systematic Review* makes to student systematic review research and learning.

To conclude, *Doing a Systematic Review* is the book of choice for all students and early career researchers who are considering or undertaking systematic review research, and makes a valuable teaching resource for all academic staff in areas of evidence-based practice.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nieky van Veggel received a copy of this book as a free inspection copy as per standard academic practice, but reports no other conflicting interests and was not involved in the conception of this book or its previous edition.

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