If you request HS/HSL Librarian assistance with a systematic review, please be prepared to discuss the questions that follow.

**What is your research question?**
The librarian will need a short description of the question or topic you plan to address in your review. To assist the librarian in developing the best possible search strategy, plan to discuss your reason for addressing the research question through a systematic review, existing literature on the topic, and possible terminology to include in the search.

**Have you determined that there are no existing systematic reviews or systematic review protocols that address your question?**
Before starting your project, it is important to verify whether someone has previously addressed the research question in a review. A librarian can complete a thorough search of databases and other resources (e.g. CRD’s Prospero) to ensure that you are not duplicating the work of others. Even if a systematic review already exists, you will want to assess the review’s quality and whether an update would be of value.

**Do you have a protocol?**
Like any well-designed research study, a systematic review should begin with the development of a protocol (a detailed description of the objectives and methods of the review). A librarian can recommend resources on developing protocols, including existing standards and examples. The librarian can also assist in developing the section of the protocol that describes the literature search methodology. The literature search process is aided greatly by a written protocol. We encourage all investigators to register their protocols. IOM Standards: 2.6, 2.8; Prospero.

**Have you assembled a research team?**
Many tasks in the systematic review process should be performed by more than one individual (e.g. screening search results) or require individuals with specialized skills (data analysis, literature searching). Sharing tasks also increases efficiency and reduces risk of error and bias. If you plan to do a meta-analysis, consider including a biostatistician on the review team. First-time review authors are encouraged to work with others who have previous experience with systematic reviews. IOM Standard: 2.1.

**Do you plan to use a reference management tool, to manage the search results?**
Literature searches for systematic reviews may produce thousands of records. Your ability to organize and manage these results will impact your ability to complete the systematic review. Librarians at the HS/HSL can recommend tools (e.g. EndNote, Mendeley) to manage literature search results. See the library’s guide to selecting a reference management tool.
Do you have time to screen the results of comprehensive literature searches?
Systematic literature searches may produce thousands of records that must be systematically and independently screened by research team members. The literature search results and the results of the screening process must themselves be thoroughly documented. Librarians can recommend tools and software designed to help with the screening process. IOM Standards 3.3; 3.4; 3.5.

What is your timetable for the systematic review?
Like other types of studies, systematic reviews require substantial time to complete (one year or longer is a realistic expectation). Establishing a timetable for your project will help the librarian develop a reasonable schedule for conducting searches and delivering results. IOM Standard 2.6.11.

Have you considered where you would like to publish your systematic review?
Not all journals publish systematic reviews, and those that do may have submission criteria or author instructions that are specific to systematic reviews.

Are you familiar with existing standards for the design, conduct and reporting of systematic reviews?
If you are not familiar with standards for systematic reviews, we highly recommend that you take a look at the IOM Standards for Systematic Reviews and the PRISMA Statement.

Will the librarian be a co-author on the final manuscript?
A librarian who designs and conducts comprehensive literature searches for a systematic review makes a major scholarly contribution to that project. As such, the librarian should be included as a co-author on the primary manuscript that arises from the project. As a co-author, the librarian will be responsible for writing the section of the manuscript that describes the literature search methodology.

References


http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/ “International prospective register of systematic reviews in health and social care.”