If you request HS/HSL Librarian assistance with a systematic review, please be prepared to discuss the following information. If you are a student, resident, or postdoc working under the supervision of a faculty mentor, your mentor must be able to attend an initial meeting with a librarian.

**What is your research question?**
The librarian will need a short description of the question 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 and possible terminology to include in the search. Please be aware that a systematic review is not always the best way to address a research question. You can learn more about different types of reviews on our website.

**Are you aware of landmark articles related to your research question?**
To help draft the literature search, please be prepared to share 5-10 articles that you would expect to include in your systematic review.

**A written protocol is required.**
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. We highly recommend that you register your protocol with Prospero. This will improve transparency and reproducibility, in addition to reducing duplication of effort. **A written protocol is required before a librarian can begin work on a literature search.** IOM Standards: 2.6, 2.8; Prospero.

**Who is on your research team?**
Many tasks in the systematic review process must be performed by more than one individual (e.g. screening search results) or require individuals with specialized skills (e.g. data analysis, literature searching). Sharing tasks also increases efficiency and reduces risk of error and bias. Your team should include:

- At least 2 individuals who will independently screen articles and perform the data extraction
- An expert in the content area of the research question
- An individual experienced in conducting systematic reviews
- A statistician, if you are conducting a meta-analysis

IOM Standard: 2.1.

**What is your planned timeline?**
A systematic review typically takes at least 12 months to complete, depending on a team’s organization and other commitments. Establishing a realistic timetable for your project will help the librarian develop a reasonable schedule for conducting searches and delivering results. Librarians typically require 3-4 weeks to complete systematic review literature searches. Please be aware that HS/HSL librarians collaborate on a limited number of systematic reviews at any time and may not be able to immediately begin work on your literature searches.
How will you manage the results of the literature searches?
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.

Have you thought about how you will obtain the articles you want to use in your review?
Most articles will be available through the HS/HSL’s journal subscriptions. Other articles will need to be requested by using the HS/HSL’s Interlibrary Loan service. Librarians cannot make these requests on behalf of a research team.

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 an author on the primary manuscript that arises from the project. As an 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.”