



Cochrane Anaesthesia & Cochrane Emergency and Critical Care

Guidance for Writing the
Search Methods Section in
Protocols and Reviews

Last Updated: July 2020



1 Overview

This document provides guidance and template text for reporting the ‘*Search methods for identification of studies*’ section of your protocol and review.

1.1 Protocol

Further guidance for reporting of this section in your protocol is available (see [MECIR PR17-PR21](#)).

1.2 Review

Please note that at review stage, the text in this section should be changed to past tense, (e.g., change ‘We will search’ to ‘We searched’) and all dates on which the searches were run should be incorporated (see [MECIR R33-R38](#)). Any deviations from the protocol should be disclosed in the ‘Differences between protocol and review’ section.

1.3 Review Update

Guidance for planning the search for review updates is available (see [MECIR UR4](#); and [MECIR UR3](#)). In general, the search methods used for both the original review and the update should be included and any deviations from the conduct of the original review should be clearly noted.

2 Template Text

This template text applies to the ‘Search methods for identification of studies’ section of your protocol or review. Please use the following template text as a starting point for the reporting of your search methods within your protocol. This template can then be built on for reporting of the search methods within your review.

2.1 Box 1: Template Text

Search methods for identification of studies

Electronic searches

We will search for studies as described in the Cochrane Handbook of Systematic reviews of Interventions Chapter 4 (Lefebvre 2019). We will not impose any language, publication year, or publication status restrictions.

We will run searches for relevant systematic reviews on the topic.

We will search the following databases for eligible studies:

- Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL) (latest Issue)
- MEDLINE (Ovid SP, 1946-Date)
- EMBASE (Ovid SP, 1974-Date)
- Web of Science (SCI-EXPANDED 1945-Date)

We developed a draft search strategy in MEDLINE. The search strategy can be found in Appendix 1. It will be adapted to the other databases for the full review. We combined the MEDLINE search with the Cochrane Highly Sensitive Search Strategy for identifying randomised trials in MEDLINE (Lefebvre 2019). Where appropriate, we will use similar search strategies for identifying RCTs in the other databases.

Searching other resources

We will search the bibliographic references and citations of relevant studies and systematic reviews for further potentially eligible studies.

In Google Scholar we will run a simple keyword search and check the first 200 references.

We will search the following trial registries for unpublished and ongoing studies:

- ClinicalTrials.gov (<https://www.clinicaltrials.gov/>)
- World Health Organization International Clinical Trials Registry Platform (<http://apps.who.int/trialsearch/Default.aspx>)

When necessary we will contact trial authors, experts in the field or manufacturers for additional information.

We will check our included studies for retractions.

The search strategy was developed in consultation with the Cochrane Anaesthesia/Cochrane Emergency and Critical Care Information Specialist.

- If you plan to search databases other than those mentioned above e.g. CINAHL, PsycInfo or Biosis, please add them to the above list and note the start date.
- If you are planning to hand-search journals or meeting or conference proceedings, please indicate which ones.
- If you include any additional grey literature searching methods, these should also be reported clearly, including the methods used to search the platforms used.
- Remember, all appendices should be properly linked in text

3 Handbook Reference

Lefebvre 2019

Lefebvre C, Glanville J, Briscoe S, Littlewood A, Marshall C, Metzendorf M-I, Noel-Storr A, Rader T, Shokraneh F, Thomas J, Wieland LS. Chapter 4: Searching for and selecting studies. In: Higgins JPT, Thomas J, Chandler J, Cumpston M, Li T, Page MJ, Welch VA (editors). *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* version 6.0 (updated July 2019). Cochrane, 2019.

Available at: <https://training.cochrane.org/handbook/current/chapter-04>