



Cochrane Anaesthesia & Cochrane Emergency and Critical Care

**Guidance for Writing the
Search Methods Section in
Protocols and Reviews**

Last Updated: October 2021



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 in the protocol is available in [MECIR PR17-PR21](#).

1.2 Review

Further guidance for reporting in the review is available in [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. The template can then be built on for reporting extra searching.

2.1 Box 1: Template Text

Search methods for identification of studies

Protocol

Electronic searches

We will search for studies as described in Cochrane Handbook of Systematic reviews of Interventions Chapter 4 (Lefebvre 2021). We will not impose any language, publication year, or publication status restrictions.

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 (Appendix 1) which will be adapted to the rest of the databases. We combined the MEDLINE search with an RCT-filter as recommended by Cochrane Handbook (Lefebvre 2021). Where appropriate, we will use similar search strategies for identifying RCTs in the rest of the databases.

We will search for relevant systematic reviews on the same topic

Searching other resources

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

In Google Scholar and Google we will run simple keyword searches and check the first 100 references.

We will search the following trial registers for unpublished and ongoing studies:

- *ClinicalTrials.gov (<https://www.clinicaltrials.gov/>)*
- *WHO ICTRP (<https://trialsearch.who.int/>)*

If necessary, we will contact trial authors and experts in the field for additional information.

We will search for errata and retractions for included studies in PubMed and Retraction Watch Database (<http://retractiondatabase.org/>).

The search strategy was developed by our local information specialist and peer reviewed by the Cochrane Anaesthesia/Cochrane Emergency and Critical Care Information Specialist.

Review**Electronic searches**

We have searched for studies as described in Cochrane Handbook of Systematic reviews of Interventions Chapter 4 (Lefebvre 2021). We did not impose any language, publication year, or publication status restrictions.

We searched 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 search strategy in MEDLINE (Appendix 1) and adapted it to the rest of the databases. We combined the MEDLINE search with an RCT-filter recommended by Cochrane Handbook (Lefebvre 2021). Where appropriate, we used similar search strategies for identifying RCTs in the rest of the databases.

We searched for relevant systematic reviews on the same topic in Epistemonikos (or other databases).

Searching other resources

We searched the bibliographic references and citations of included studies and systematic reviews for other potentially eligible studies. We used Web of Science (or other database) for the citation searches.

In Google Scholar and Google we ran simple keyword searches and checked the first 100 references.

We searched the following trial registers for unpublished and ongoing studies:

- *ClinicalTrials.gov (<https://www.clinicaltrials.gov/>)*

- WHO ICTRP (<https://trialssearch.who.int/>)

We contacted trial authors and experts in the field for additional information.

We searched for errata and retractions for included studies in PubMed and Retraction Watch Database (<http://retractiondatabase.org/>).

The search strategy was developed by our local information specialist and peer reviewed by the Cochrane Anaesthesia/Cochrane Emergency and Critical Care Information Specialist.

We used EndNote (or other software) to deduplicate the references before screening the search result.

- 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.
- All search strategies, including searches in trial registers and for grey literature, must be reported in the review along with information about interfaces/platforms and the database used for citations searching.
- Remember, all appendices should be properly linked in text

3 Handbook Reference

Lefebvre 2021

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 6.2 (updated February 2021). Cochrane, 2021.

Available from www.training.cochrane.org/handbook.