



The Evidence Synthesis Handbook

Six guides to designing, running and defending an evidence synthesis, collected in one volume.

-
- PART ONE** General Guide to Systematic Reviews
 - PART TWO** Steps to Complete a Meta-Analysis
 - PART THREE** Steps to Complete a Network Meta-Analysis
 - PART FOUR** Steps to Complete an Umbrella Review
 - PART FIVE** What Journal Reviewers Look For
 - PART SIX** Tools for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

Written from practitioner experience across published systematic reviews and meta-analyses, including network meta-analyses registered on INPLASY.

For educational and personal reference use.



Contents

1	PART ONE	4
	General Guide to Systematic Reviews	pp. 5–26
The full workflow from protocol registration and PICO framing through searching, screening, risk of bias and structured narrative synthesis.		
2	PART TWO	27
	Steps to Complete a Meta-Analysis	pp. 28–44
Choosing effect measures and models, estimating heterogeneity, reading forest plots, testing publication bias and rating certainty with GRADE.		
3	PART THREE	45
	Steps to Complete a Network Meta-Analysis	pp. 46–66
Network geometry, transitivity and consistency, frequentist versus Bayesian estimation, ranking metrics and how to report them honestly.		
4	PART FOUR	67
	Steps to Complete an Umbrella Review	pp. 68–85
Synthesising existing systematic reviews and meta-analyses: overlap, credibility ceilings, AMSTAR 2 appraisal and evidence classification.		
5	PART FIVE	86
	What Journal Reviewers Look For	pp. 87–99
The checks reviewers run, in the order they run them, and how to close each gap before submission rather than after.		
6	PART SIX	100
	Tools for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses	pp. 101–114
A stage-by-stage reference to the software and platforms behind each step, the alternatives that exist, and why one is chosen over another.		
	CLOSING	115
	Master Pre-Submission Checklist	
Every checkpoint from the six parts, gathered into one page to work through before you submit.		



The Evidence Synthesis Handbook

This volume collects the six guides of the Research Methods Series in the order they are used in practice: from planning a systematic review, through pooling and network estimation, to umbrella reviews, reviewer expectations and the tools behind each stage. Each part is reproduced in full; only the individual covers have been replaced by part dividers, and page numbers now run continuously.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Meridian Research Consultancy (2026). *The Evidence Synthesis Handbook: Research Methods Series, Parts One to Six*. Meridian Research Consultancy.

USE

For educational and personal reference use. Not a substitute for the reporting guidelines, tool manuals and journal instructions it points to.

All third-party tool, database and guideline names are the property of their respective owners and appear here for identification only.





PART ONE

General Guide to Systematic Reviews

Including SWiM narrative synthesis

The full workflow from protocol registration and PICO framing through searching, screening, risk of bias and structured narrative synthesis.

PAGES 5–26



Table of Contents

1	Introduction and Purpose	6	7	Quality and Risk of Bias Assessment	17
2	Understanding Review Types	7	8	Narrative Synthesis and SWiM	19
3	Protocol Registration	9	9	Certainty of Evidence: GRADE	21
4	Developing Your PICO(S) Framework	11	10	Reporting and PRISMA 2020	23
5	Database Search Strategy	13	11	Handling Peer Review	25
6	Deduplication and Screening	15	12	Master Checklists	27

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Work through this guide sequentially for a new systematic review, or jump to the relevant section when you need specific methodological guidance. Each section is self-contained. Real reviewer feedback is integrated throughout; these are comments drawn from actual peer review responses to systematic reviews.



SCOPE LIMITATION

This guide covers systematic reviews with narrative synthesis and the SWiM framework. It does **not** cover meta-analysis, network meta-analysis, or umbrella reviews; these are addressed in separate companion guides.