

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Writing a Review Article

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#### Why write a review article?

Review articles are very important because they are a useful resource for:

- clinical nurses – by summarising the evidence and giving pointers for practice development
- researchers – by identifying previous studies in the area of interest, and critiquing their methods. This is a great help in planning future studies. Some reviews are also designed to develop theory which can be tested in future research studies.
- teachers and students – by summarising and discussing existing knowledge
- the authors of reviews themselves – by making their work accessible to a wide readership.

Review papers are the most likely to be read and cited by other people

#### What exactly is a review article?

The best kind of review article today is probably a systematic review, which is like a research project in itself and may focus exclusively on trials, qualitative evidence or a combination of mixed methods. . A narrative or integrative review is less systematic and all-inclusive. A useful book explaining these types of review and giving nursing examples is:

Webb C & Roe B (2007) *Reviewing Research Evidence for Nursing Practice. Systematic Reviews.* Blackwell Publishing, Oxford

Evidence synthesis is similar to a systematic review, but includes qualitative as well as quantitative studies. Meta-analysis combines the results of a number of clinical trials in order to draw conclusions about treatment effectiveness. There are as yet few nursing research trials which give enough data for a meta-analysis, but it is increasingly common in medical research. A useful guide to meta-analysis is:

Chalmers I , Altman DG, Egger M and Davey Smith G (2001) *Systematic review in health care: meta-analysis in context.* BMJ Books, London

Another source of information about conducting and reporting meta-analyses is

<http://www.greenjournal.org/misc/quorum.pdf>

When planning to write a review article, look at examples already published in your chosen journal.

#### What are the essential points to remember when writing a review article?

Although there may be differences for each type of review (see below), certain principles apply to all review articles:

- state the question that your review aimed to answer
- give as much information on the type of review, and the methods and processes followed.

- give as much information as possible on how you searched for the papers in the review, including databases, keywords, dates and languages covered, inclusion/exclusion criteria
- include an appraisal of the quality of the papers included
- use tables to summarise the papers included
- make clear what your review adds to existing knowledge. This means that you must analyse the material and come up with new conclusions. It is not enough just to describe what other people have reported.
- use headings and subheadings to present your analysis of the articles included
- identify the issues arising from your review for nursing practice and further research
- Make clear any limitations in terms of methods and generalisability

### **Writing up a systematic review for publication**

The methodology of systematic reviews is well-established, as is the appropriate way to write them up. You can find information about this at [http://www.cochrane-oral.man.ac.uk/cochrane\\_collaboration.htm](http://www.cochrane-oral.man.ac.uk/cochrane_collaboration.htm). This site will also give you information about their Handbook for carrying out and reporting systematic reviews. **Table 1** also shows the information needed in a published report of a systematic review.

Other helpful references are:

Glasziou P (2001) Systematic review in health care. A practical guide. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Khan K, Kunz R Kleijnen J and Antes G (2003) Systematic reviews to support evidence-based medicine. How to review and apply findings of healthcare research. Royal Society of Medicine, London.

Writing up a narrative or integrative review for publication

Some journals may also have guidelines for presenting systematic reviews, and an example can be found at <http://www.journalofadvancednursing.com/default.asp?file=guidereview>

Writing up a meta-synthesis for publication

Meta-synthesis is a more recent development but the general principles for reporting a systematic review apply to this too. A useful resource is:

Paterson BL, Thorne, S E, Canam, C and Jillings, C. (2001) Meta-study of qualitative health research: a practical guide to meta-analysis and meta-synthesis. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

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