Search methods and strategy peer review assessment form for Cochrane intervention protocols[[1]](#footnote-1)

For use by a Cochrane Information Specialist, or an expert searcher external to Cochrane, to peer review a draft protocol's search methods, including the primary database strategy.

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| Review title |  |
| Authors |  |
| Editorial team |  |

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| Reviewer: | Email: | Date of Completion: |

Part A of this form (items 1-5) is structured around the search-related mandatory requirements for Cochrane intervention protocols as detailed in the MECIR standards for reporting protocols. The complete MECIR manual can be found here: <https://community.cochrane.org/mecir-manual>

Part B of this form (items 6-11) presents the [PRESS](https://www.jclinepi.com/article/S0895-4356(16)00058-5/fulltext) elements (adapted by the Cochrane Information Specialist Support Team in 2019) for assessing the main database search strategy provided in the protocol. Where appropriate, each item also details the relevant MECIR conduct standard.

PART A: MECIR ELEMENTS

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| **1. Search sources**  **PR17 List all sources that will be searched, including: CRG specialized register(s), CENTRAL, other databases, trials registers, websites and grey literature.**  *See also* [*related conduct standards C24, C26 and C27*](https://community.cochrane.org/mecir-manual/standards-conduct-new-cochrane-intervention-reviews-c1-c75/performing-review-c24-c75/searching-studies-c24-c38) *for sources that are mandatory to search and therefore should be listed in the protocol* | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested[[2]](#footnote-2) | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **2. Reference checking**  **PR17 …State whether reference lists will be searched and whether individuals or organizations will be contacted.** | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **3. Search restrictions**  **PR18 Specify and justify any restrictions to be placed on the search (e.g. time period or publication format).**  *See also* [*related conduct standards C19 and C35*](https://community.cochrane.org/mecir-manual/standards-conduct-new-cochrane-intervention-reviews-c1-c75/performing-review-c24-c75/searching-studies-c24-c38) *for more information on restrictions* | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **4. Searches for different types of evidence**  **PR19 Some reviews (e.g. qualitative, adverse effects, ...) extend beyond a focus on the effects of healthcare interventions and address specific additional types of evidence.** | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **5. Search strategy (or strategies)**  **PR20 Present the complete search strategy (or strategies) to be implemented for at least one database in an Appendix, including any limits and filters to be used.** | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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PART B: PRESS ELEMENTS

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| **6. TRANSLATION/STRUCTURE OF SEARCH**  **C32 Inform the structure of search strategies in bibliographic databases around the main concepts of the review, using appropriate elements from PICO and study design. In structuring the search, maximize sensitivity whilst striving for reasonable precision.**  *See full MECIR item* [*here*](https://community.cochrane.org/mecir-manual/standards-conduct-new-cochrane-intervention-reviews-c1-c75/performing-review-c24-c75/searching-studies-c24-c38) | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **7. BOOLEAN AND PROXIMITY OPERATORS**  **C32 …ensure correct use of the AND and OR operators.** *See full MECIR item* [*here*](https://community.cochrane.org/mecir-manual/standards-conduct-new-cochrane-intervention-reviews-c1-c75/performing-review-c24-c75/searching-studies-c24-c38) | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **8. SUBJECT HEADINGS**  **C33 Identify appropriate controlled vocabulary (e.g. MeSH, Emtree, including 'exploded' terms).** *See full MECIR item* [*here*](https://community.cochrane.org/mecir-manual/standards-conduct-new-cochrane-intervention-reviews-c1-c75/performing-review-c24-c75/searching-studies-c24-c38) | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **9. TEXT WORD SEARCHING**  **C33 … and free-text terms (considering, for example, spelling variants, synonyms, acronyms, truncation and proximity operators).** *See full MECIR item* [*here*](https://community.cochrane.org/mecir-manual/standards-conduct-new-cochrane-intervention-reviews-c1-c75/performing-review-c24-c75/searching-studies-c24-c38) | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **10. SPELLING, SYNTAX, AND LINE NUMBERS** | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **11. LIMITS AND FILTERS**  **C19 … ensuring that relevant time periods … and not restricted by language or publication status.**  **C34 Use specially designed and tested search filters where appropriate including the Cochrane Highly Sensitive Search Strategies for identifying randomized trials in MEDLINE, but do not use filters in pre-filtered databases e.g. do not use a randomized trial filter in CENTRAL or a systematic review filter in DARE.** *See full MECIR items* [*here*](https://community.cochrane.org/mecir-manual/standards-conduct-new-cochrane-intervention-reviews-c1-c75/performing-review-c24-c75/searching-studies-c24-c38) | |
| A. No revisions | □ |
| B. Revision(s) suggested | □ |
| C. Revision(s) required | □ |

*If “B” or “C,” please provide an explanation or example:*

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| **RECOMMENDATION:**  **Please see the guidance below on recommendations in Editorial Manager** | |
| Accept | □ |
| Minor Revision | □ |
| Major Revision | □ |
| Reject | □ |

**Additional comments:**

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**Declaration of conflicts of interest**

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| **Do you have any potential conflict of interest?** | □ **Yes (details below)** | □ **No** |
| You should declare and describe any present or past affiliations or other involvement in any organisation or entity with an interest in the outcome of the review that might lead to a real or perceived conflict of interest. This includes acting as an investigator of a study that might be included in this review. You should declare potential conflicts even if you are confident that your judgement is not influenced. | | |
| **Conflict of interest statement:** | | |

**Peer referee anonymity and acknowledgement**

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|  | **Yes** | **No** |
| I am willing to be identified as the author of this referee feedback | □ | □ |
| I am happy to be acknowledged in the published review | □ | □ |
| I am happy to be acknowledged on the Group’s website | □ | □ |

**Peer reviewer Guidance: First-order and second-order problems in search conduct**

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| **First-order problems (likely to impact recall)** | **Second-order problems (likely to impact precision)** |
| - Errors in conceptualization  - Errors using logical operators  - Spelling errors  - Error in the combination of lines  - Missing MeSH terms | - Missing free-text language  - Missing free-text and MeSH combinations  - Missing spelling variants  - Inadequate truncation  - Irrelevant free-text language  - Inadequate use of limits |

**Peer reviewer Guidance re: Required vs suggested revisions**

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| **Peer Review form items** | **Required revisions** | **Suggested revisions** |
| **Part A (MECIR) – Reporting** | Missing mandatory MECIR items  Inconsistent methods reporting (e.g., search dates) | Missing highly desirable MECIR items |
| **Part A (MECIR) – Conduct** | Missing mandatory MECIR items | Missing highly desirable MECIR items |
| **Part B (PRESS) – Search strategy** | First order problems | Second order problems  Expert searcher suggestions |

**Peer reviewer Guidance re: Recommendations in Editorial Manager**

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| **Recommendation** | **Revision types** |
| Reject | Many required revisions in Part A (conduct items)  Many required revisions in Part B  High likelihood of missed eligible studies  Very low confidence team could address revisions |
| Major revisions | Required revisions in Part A (conduct items)  Required revisions in Part B  Possibility of missed eligible studies |
| Minor revisions | Required revisions in Part A (reporting items)  Suggested revisions in Part B  Low likelihood of missed eligible studies |
| Accept | Suggested or no revisions in Part A  Suggested or no revisions in Part B  Low likelihood of missed eligible studies |

1. Designed specifically for use with protocols of intervention reviews of RCTs. Please use with caution when reviewing protocols for other review types. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Please see the guidance below on suggested vs required revisions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)