Where and how are they used?

While this guide focuses on systematic reviews in the health sciences, you will find systematic reviews in many disciplines including social sciences, management, education, legal studies, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields.

Are there different ways of defining the systematic review?

There are several ways of doing the systematic review in the health sciences, and specific definitions vary accordingly. The most widely used definition is that of the Cochrane organisation, which is the leading authority on evidence-based systematic reviews:

The systematic review is "a review of a clearly formulated question that uses systematic and explicit methods to identify, select, and critically appraise relevant research, and to collect and analyse data from the studies that are included in the review. Statistical methods (meta-analysis) may or many not be used to analyse and summarise the results of the included studies."

http://www.cochrane.org/glossary

In this guide, we will also make references to other systematic definitions and methodologies, for example those by the Joanna Briggs Institute.

When should you do a systematic review?

Systematic reviews are most useful

- when there is a large body of published literature pertaining to a specific question
- when a transparent search methodology and replicability are needed
• when multiple published studies point to contradictory or uncertain results or outcomes

**Why are systematic reviews such a big deal?**

When done well, the systematic review provides a quality synthesis of studies that informs policy and help practitioners keep up with the increasing volume of research being published. In the health sciences, this can facilitate evidence-based practice (EBP), better patient outcomes and efficient health services.

*Seventy-five trials and eleven systematic reviews a day: how will we ever keep up?*