#### Item 4: OBJECTIVES.

Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed with reference to participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS).

**Example.** “To examine whether topical or intraluminal antibiotics reduce catheter-related bloodstream infection, we reviewed randomized, controlled trials that assessed the efficacy of these antibiotics for primary prophylaxis against catheter-related bloodstream infection and mortality compared with no antibiotic therapy in adults undergoing hemodialysis.”

#### Explanation.

The questions being addressed, and the rationale for them, are one of the most critical parts of a systematic review. They should be stated precisely and explicitly so that readers can understand quickly the review's scope and the potential applicability of the review to their interests . Framing questions so that they include the following five “PICOS” components may improve the explicitness of review questions: (1) the patient population or disease being addressed (P), (2) the interventions or exposure of interest (I), (3) the comparators (C), (4) the main outcome or endpoint of interest (O), and (5) the study designs chosen (S). For more detail regarding PICOS, see [Box 2](http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1000100#pmed-1000100-box002).

Good review questions may be narrowly focused or broad, depending on the overall objectives of the review. Sometimes broad questions might increase the applicability of the results and facilitate detection of bias, exploratory analyses, and sensitivity analyses. Whether narrowly focused or broad, precisely stated review objectives are critical as they help define other components of the review process such as the eligibility criteria (Item 6) and the search for relevant literature (Items 7 and 8).