

Written Assignment 2

Questions & Answers

Q1. *Is it better to find SR and MA than RCTs to answer my PICO question? If so, how can I summarize them in the cochrane table because there are different methods, interventions etc?*

A1. The answer to your first question was covered in session 4 (slides 9 and 16) and we discussed it in class last week. In response to the second question, if your critical appraisal of an SR or an MA indicates that it is a high quality study, then there is no need to also critically appraise the primary studies on which it was based. However, if you determine that the SR/MA was not of sufficient quality, you may then want to read and appraise the primary studies yourself. Even if you found a high quality SR or MA, you will still want to search for more recent primary studies that address your PICO question.

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Q2. *Is it okay to use SR and MA only to write the WA2?*

A2. See A1 above.

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Q3. *Do I have to critically appraise each study using a critical appraisal form?*

A3. Yes, but you do not need to submit these forms—only a summary of them.

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Q4. *I'm not sure but it seems you mentioned we need to complete an appraisal form (e.g. CATE) for each study we decided to include. But in the description it didn't say we have to hand in them in the appendix. So do we have to complete a form for each and include every form in our submission?*

A4. As stated in item 6 of the instructions for the assignment in the Course Syllabus, you need to draw conclusions about the quality of the studies you critically appraised. In doing so, you could summarise some of the key strengths and weaknesses of those studies. However, you do not need to attach your critical appraisal forms to the assignment, as you did in the first written assignment. We strongly advise you to keep your completed critical appraisal forms in case we ask you for them.

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Q5. *You mentioned we could read systematic reviews and skip those studies included in the SR, and in that case we would only have to finish one appraisal form. First of all I hope my understanding regarding this is correct. In that case, are we required to draft separate Cochrane tables for each study included, but not for a SR? Because the table doesn't seem appropriate for a SR/ meta analysis.*

A5. See A1 above. To clarify further, it is not necessary to include the primary studies on which the SR or MA was based in your Cochrane table, unless for some reason you decided to read one or more of those studies yourself (which you are welcome to do). As in the example in the study listed in footnote 2 of the Course Syllabus, you only need one Cochrane table and it will include summaries of all the studies you read and appraised.

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Q6. Regarding the Cochrane table, I'm confused about what to include in the rows "method", "participants" and "interventions". This is because usually, "participants" and "interventions" are two sub-sections under "method". So what are we supposed to write in "method"? Or to put it simple, If I deem that I can include all important information, can I freely modify the "rows" as I wish but not follow strictly to the 7 rows suggested in the syllabus?

A6. See the PDF document entitled *Cochrane Table Summarising Study Details* in the Resources section of Moodle. It gives two examples of what goes into the Cochrane table — and they are slightly different. The example from the Law et al. study includes a row for Methods but the example from Meinusch and Romonath does not. If you compare the rows in each example, they are essentially the same, although the terms used are somewhat different. What Law et al. call *Methods* appears in the other study as *Study Design and Question*, so I suggest specifying those and anything else you think is worth mentioning about the methods. Please note point 5 of the instructions for Written Assignment 2, about which set of headings to use in your assignment.

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Q7. Regarding the table for risk of bias, there is a column named "author's judgment". I just want to make sure my understanding regarding it is correct:

- Adequate - there is information about it in the paper, and the author indicated that such bias can be avoided
- Inadequate - there is information about it in the paper, but the author confessed about the limitations/ flaws
- Unclear - there is no information for us to judge whether such bias exists or not

How about if there is enough information for me to judge whether there is such bias, but the author did not address the problem himself or I could think of new points to disagree with his judgment? Do I only state the author's judgment, even if I do not agree with his judgment?

A7. Your understanding of the 3 categories is fine, but you are also entitled to disagree with the author about bias. If you do disagree with the author, you should state your view and why you think that.

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Q8. In the syllabus, it says we should include "6. A critical appraisal of this evidence followed by your conclusion(s)" in our WA.

a) I am unclear about what exactly we are required to write in the main body of the WA - do we:

- i) appraise each paper and make conclusions separately, then wrap everything up with an "overall conclusion"; or we
- ii) appraise the set of evidence we have collected on a whole, just as what a real SR would do?

b) With the term "appraisal", do we talk about the overall "importance and validity" of the set of evidence and give a clinical baseline, just like what we usually do in class? Other than "importance and validity", do you suggest other aspects of the evidence to be appraised, or it would be fine to focus mainly on the two? I'm confused about this because we have limited experience in writing critical appraisals of research evidence and I don't know if what I have in mind is enough to meet your expectations on this WA.

A8. We expect the “main body of the WA” to address the first 7 items listed in the Course Syllabus under Written Assignment 2. You are expected to critically each paper you include in your review, but as indicated previously, you do not attach the actual critical appraisal forms (e.g., CATE). Instead, you should summarise the *main* strengths and weaknesses of the evidence you appraised in the main body of your assignment and draw conclusions from that. As implied in your questions, this written assignment is actually a sort of mini-systematic review!

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Please note that we have set aside the last class session (week 14 of the syllabus) to answer your questions. So if you have any other questions, please bring them to class then.

TK, 2018-04-03