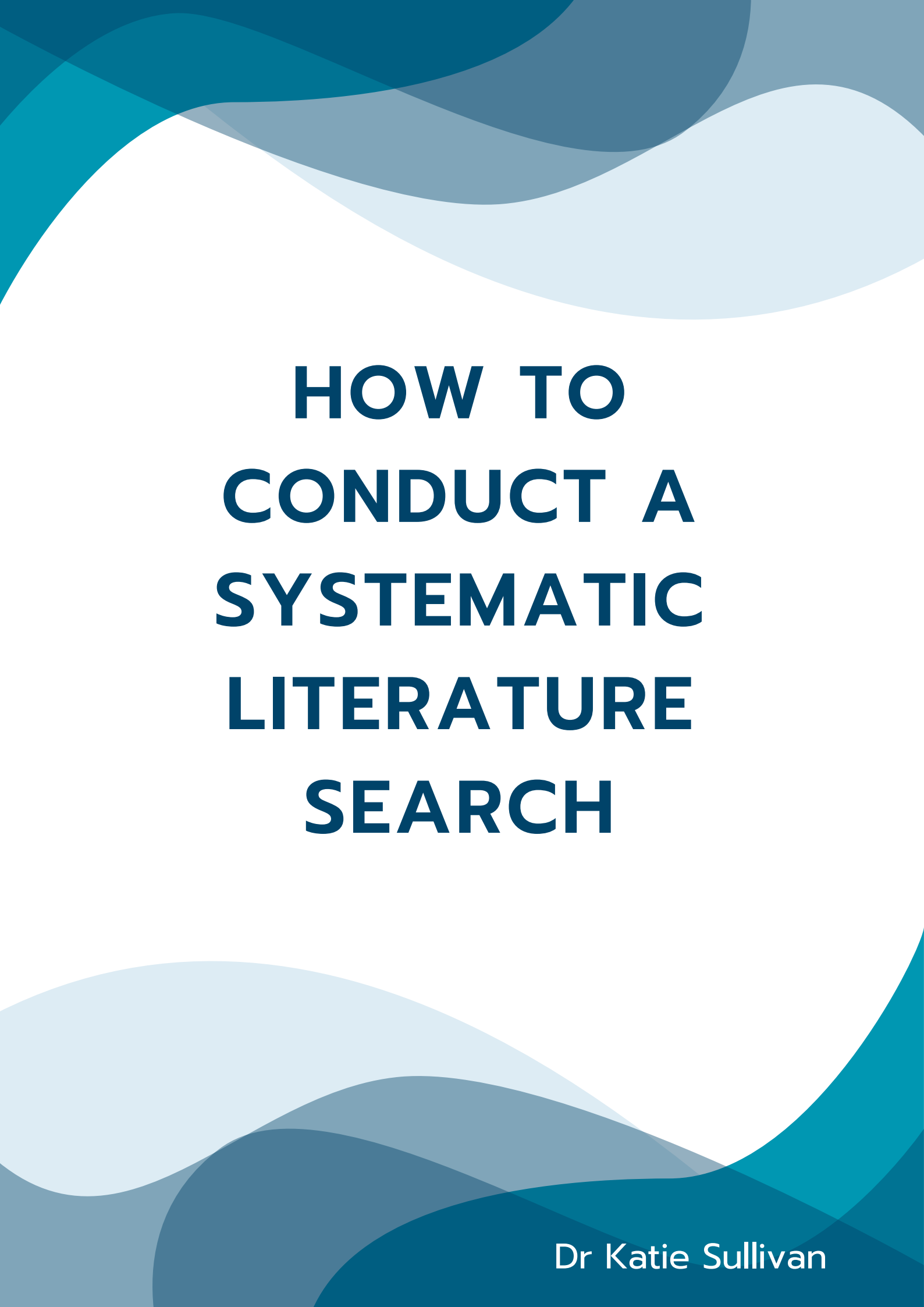




HOW TO CONDUCT A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE SEARCH

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Introduction: Why a Systematic Literature Search Matters

In psychology, research does not start from scratch. Before designing a study, you need to understand what is already known. A systematic literature search helps you find, evaluate, and organise existing research in a clear and unbiased way.

Conducting a systematic search allows you to:

- Build a strong theoretical foundation for your study
- Justify your research question
- Identify gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations in past research
- Avoid relying on opinion or outdated information

Think of a systematic search as a structured, transparent way of finding evidence, rather than randomly searching the internet.

Step 1: Clarify Your Research Question

A clear research question guides your entire search strategy. If your research question is unclear, your literature search will be unfocused and overwhelming.

Example research question: Does social media use predict body dissatisfaction among adolescents?

From this, you can identify key concepts:

- Social media use
- Body dissatisfaction
- Adolescents

Step 2: Identify Keywords and Search Terms

Break your research question into main concepts and generate alternative search terms.

Include:

- Synonyms
- Related terms
- American and British spellings where relevant

Concept	Possible Search Terms
Social media	social media, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok
Body dissatisfaction	body image, body dissatisfaction, appearance concerns
Adolescents	adolescents, teenagers, youth

Step 3: Choose Appropriate Databases

Different databases index different types of research. In psychology, you should primarily use academic databases, not Google alone.

Start with the Databases within the library system: [Library Databases](#)

Step 4: Use Search Definitions to Combine Keywords

This will help you structure your search:

- AND – narrows the search
- OR – broadens the search
- NOT – excludes terms

Example Search String:

("social media" OR Instagram OR TikTok) AND ("body image" OR body dissatisfaction) AND (adolescents OR teenagers)

Step 5: Apply Filters and Limits

To make your search manageable and relevant, apply filters:

Common limits include:

- Publication date (e.g., last 10 years)
- Peer-reviewed journals
- Language (e.g., English)
- Population (human studies)

Always note which filters you use - this shows your search was systematic and transparent!

Step 6: Screen Titles and Abstracts

Not everything you find will be useful. If you're unsure, keep the paper — you can exclude it later.

First screening:

- Read titles and abstracts
- Exclude studies that are clearly irrelevant

Ask yourself:

- Does this study relate directly to my research question?
- Does it use an appropriate population?

Step 7: Read Full Texts Critically

Once you've selected relevant papers, read them more carefully. You don't need to understand every statistical detail; focus on what the study found and how.

Focus on:

- Aims and hypotheses
- Methodology
- Key findings
- Limitations

How it relates to your research question

Step 8: Organise Your Literature

Use reference management tools:

- Zotero
- Mendeley
- EndNote

Organise papers by:

- Theme
- Theory
- Method
- Findings

Documenting your Systematic Literature Search

Good research is transparent, so it is important to keep a clear record of your search. A messy literature search leads to a messy literature review!

Record:

- Databases searched
- Keywords used
- Limits applied
- Number of papers found and retained

This is especially useful for:

- Writing your methodology section
- Avoiding plagiarism
- Staying organised

Use the Workbook provided to document your SLS