

Evaluating Your Own SLR Process

This section is distinct from [Appraise Study Quality](#), which assesses the rigor of the *primary studies* you have included. This section asks a different question: how rigorously did *you* conduct the review itself?

Overview

Quality appraisal tools such as [CASP](#), [MMAT](#), and [JBI](#) look outward: they help you evaluate the studies in your dataset. The checklist and scoring rubric on this page look *inward*: they help you evaluate your own review process against recognized best practices.

The items below are adapted from [Petersen, Vakkalanka, and Kuzniarz \(2015\)](#), who derived them from a systematic mapping study of how SLRs and systematic mapping studies are conducted in practice. Use this rubric in two ways:

- **[During planning](#)**: as a checklist of actions to build into your protocol.
- **Before submission**: as a retrospective audit to identify gaps in your process and to disclose them transparently in your methods chapter.

This rubric was developed in the context of software engineering research. The core dimensions; motivating the review, search strategy, search evaluation, extraction/classification, and validity; apply equally to business and management SLRs. Items that refer to software-engineering-specific classification schemes may be skipped if they are not relevant to your discipline.

Part 1: Activities Checklist

The table below lists the 26 actions identified by Petersen et al. (2015) as relevant to a rigorous systematic review or mapping study. Work through each row and mark whether the action was taken (✓), partially taken (∼), or not taken (✗). This produces a ratio score: count your ✓ marks and divide by 26 (or by the number of applicable items).

Phase	Action	Take n?
Motivate the review	Motivate the need and relevance of the review	
	Define objectives and research questions	
	Consult with the target audience (e.g., supervisor, domain expert) to refine questions	
Search strategy	Conduct a database search	
	Apply snowball sampling (backward and/or forward)	
	Conduct a manual search of key journals or conference proceedings	
Develop the search	Use a structured framework (PICO, SPIDER, or PCC) to derive keywords	
	Consult a librarian or domain expert during search design	
	Iteratively refine the search string to improve coverage	
	Derive additional keywords from known relevant papers	
	Use thesauri, encyclopedias, or controlled vocabularies (e.g., MeSH, EBSCO subject headings)	
Evaluate the search	Test the search against a set of known-relevant papers	
	Have an expert evaluate the search results	
	Check the web pages or profiles of key authors in the field	
	Conduct a test-retest to check consistency	

Phase	Action	Take n?
Inclusion and exclusion	Define objective, pre-specified criteria for inclusion and exclusion	
	Involve a second reviewer; resolve disagreements systematically	
	Define and apply explicit decision rules for borderline cases	
Data extraction	Define objective criteria for the extraction process	
	Blind or obscure information that could bias extraction	
	Involve a second reviewer; resolve disagreements in extraction	
	Conduct test-retest of extraction on a subset	
Classification	Classify studies by research type (e.g., empirical, conceptual, review)	
	Classify studies by research method (e.g., case study, survey, experiment)	
	Classify studies by venue type (e.g., journal, conference, practitioner publication)	
Validity	Discuss validity threats and limitations of the review process	

Part 2: Scoring Rubrics

After completing the checklist, use the rubrics below to assign a score to each of the five key dimensions. Record these scores in your methods chapter alongside a brief narrative.

Rubric 1: Motivating the Review

Score	Label	Description
0	Not described	The review is not motivated and no objectives are stated
1	Partial	Motivations and research questions are provided

Score	Label	Description
2	Full	Motivations and questions are provided and have been developed in dialogue with the target audience (supervisor, practitioners, or domain experts)

Rubric 2: Search Strategy

Score	Label	Description
0	Not described	Only one type of search was conducted
1	Minimal	Two search strategies were used
2	Full	All three strategies were used: database search, snowball sampling, and manual search

Rubric 3: Evaluating the Search

Score	Label	Description
0	Not described	No actions were taken to improve the reliability of the search or inclusion/exclusion process
1	Minimal	At least one action was taken to improve <i>either</i> the reliability of the search <i>or</i> the inclusion/exclusion process
2	Partial	At least one action was taken to improve <i>both</i> the search and the inclusion/exclusion process
3	Full	All identified actions were taken

Rubric 4: Extraction and Classification

Score	Label	Description
0	Not described	No actions were taken to improve extraction reliability or enable comparability between studies

Score	Label	Description
1	Minimal	At least one action was taken to increase extraction reliability
2	Partial	At least one action to increase extraction reliability and studies were classified by research type and method
3	Full	All identified actions were taken

Rubric 5: Study Validity

Score	Label	Description
0	Not described	No threats or limitations are described
1	Full	Threats and limitations of the review process are described

Interpreting Your Scores

No minimum threshold is formally established in the literature for general SLRs; the rubric is a diagnostic tool, not a pass/fail gate. Use the results as follows:

- **In your methods chapter:** Report your scores and briefly explain any dimension rated 0 or 1. A low score on a dimension is not automatically a fatal flaw, but it must be acknowledged as a limitation.
- **In your discussion:** Dimensions scored 0 (especially search strategy and validity) should be discussed explicitly when qualifying the strength of your conclusions.
- **As a planning aid:** If you are still in the protocol stage, any action not yet checked is a concrete item to build into your plan before searching begins.

For more detail on designing and evaluating your search strategy, see the [Search Quality Self-Assessment Checklist](#) (adapted from vom Brocke et al., 2015), which provides granular guidance on the search phase specifically.

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