



Initial interest

Information for prospective
authors



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Authoring a Cochrane systematic review

Preparing a systematic review for Cochrane is very different to submitting work to a traditional journal. The Review Groups (such as the Cochrane CFGD Group) provide advice, training and support to review authors at every stage of the process, from devising the title to publication of the full review.

Before embarking on a review you should bear in mind the considerable commitment involved in becoming a Cochrane author. Not only are Cochrane reviews rigorously produced to high standards, in order to maintain their validity and accuracy the CFGD Group requires that all reviews be updated (to take into account new evidence, for example) on an annual or two-yearly basis. Review authors are also required to respond to any comments on their work received from readers through The Cochrane Library's automated feedback system.

We recommend that lead authors work with at least one other co-author and preferably more. Many of the tasks involved in systematic reviewing require two people working independently to avoid bias, this system also helps to spread workload and bring a good variety of expertise to the review (e.g. clinical, statistical, information retrieval or perhaps a lay viewpoint).

1 Contact the Managing Editor

Before you do anything else you should contact [Tracey Remington](#) or [Nikki Jahnke](#), the Managing Editors, to register your interest in writing a review and discuss possible titles. It is important that your review does not duplicate work being undertaken elsewhere within Cochrane. The review should be achievable and you should choose a title which conforms to the Cochrane format (since Cochrane systematic reviews are generally concerned with the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions they will normally take the format TREATMENT for CONDITION). The topic of your proposed review should fall within the scope of the CFGD Group. There are several areas in which our scope overlaps with other Groups and where joint editorial responsibility is possible.

When choosing your review subject, it can be helpful to look at our [topic list](#). Details of the [full scope](#) of the CFGD Group and an up-to-date list of [CFGD reviews and protocols](#) in progress are available on the Group's website or from the Managing Editor. The Managing Editor will send you the Group's 'Title Proposal Form' on request (also available for download from our website).

2 Title proposal form

The title proposal form is used to supply basic details about yourself and your co-authors and to provide us with a brief outline of your proposed review. The completed proposal is submitted to the Group's Co-ordinating Editor and Editorial Board for comment and approval. It is intended to highlight any potential difficulties at the outset and to ensure that the review begins on the right track.

Once your proposal has been accepted, your title will be formally registered with Cochrane and you can begin work on your protocol. At this point, the details from your proposal will be entered into a [Review Manager](#) file (the bespoke Cochrane software used to produce our reviews) you will be assigned a 'Contact Editor' who will be able to help you throughout the protocol and review development process.

3 Writing the protocol

After registration of the title we normally expect a protocol to be ready for publication within **six** months. The protocol for a systematic review requires the completion of the following sections:

- Background (rationale for the review)
- Objectives of the review
- Types of studies to be included
- Types of participants
- Types of interventions
- Types of outcome measures to be looked at
- Search strategy
- Methods of the review

Review authors not submitting a protocol within six months of registering a title may lose that title.

At this stage we will provide you with access to the '[Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions](#)' (also available via the Review Manager software (see below)), which is an essential guide to every aspect of preparing and maintaining a Cochrane review. The Handbook offers detailed guidance on issues such as developing a protocol, locating and selecting studies, quality assessment, data collection, and the analysis and presentation of results. This handbook should be used in conjunction with the [Cochrane Style Guide](#).

We will also provide you with any of our own Group-specific guidelines.

3.1 Training - Workshops

At this stage many authors find it helpful to attend one of Cochrane's training workshops. These are regularly organised by the Cochrane Centres around the world. A summary of forthcoming workshops can be found [here](#) and you should also check the website of your relevant [Cochrane Centre](#) for the current scheduled workshops.

The workshops for protocol development provide a good opportunity for discussing some of the issues important to your review. They normally take a full day and begin with an introduction to Cochrane protocols and systematic reviewing, continuing with small group discussions. In these groups participants discuss their own review question including the types of studies, interventions, participants and outcomes they will consider. You will need to have thought about these issues beforehand and decided on a review question. You will also need to be familiar with the 'Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions' described above.

3.2 Training - Online learning

If you are unable to attend any workshops, a range of self-paced, open learning resources for review authors are also now [available](#). These take you step-by-step through the entire process of a review and address in detail many of the specific problems and issues you may encounter.

3.3 Review Manager

Review Manager (RevMan) is Cochrane's own software for preparing systematic reviews; the current version is 5.3. It contains the full text of the review (or protocol), performs meta-analysis of the data and presents the results graphically. A brief demonstration of RevMan is given as part of the protocol workshop and a tutorial is contained within the programme. RevMan can be [downloaded](#) for Windows, Linux and Mac.

3.4 Search Strategy

Natalie Hall is the Group's Information Specialist who maintains the Group's registers of controlled trials and searches these for each review on behalf of the review authors. However, should any additional searches be required, she will be happy to help review authors to devise these.

3.5 The Editorial Process

Once the protocol has been completed, authors should submit this to the Managing Editor via Archie. The Managing Editor will provide feedback and when appropriate, forward the protocol to the Contact Editor for approval to send to peer review (clinical subject experts, consumers of healthcare, a methodological expert and a statistician) or advice on required revisions prior to peer review.

Following peer review, the Contact Editor produces an overview of all comments, which is then sent, along with the original comments, to the review authors; in return we will ask for a response to each of the comments. Once any necessary changes have been made and the Editor gives approval, the protocol is forwarded to the Co-ordinating Editor for final approval before it is submitted for publication on [The Cochrane Library](#).

4 Writing the review

After publication of the protocol we expect a review to be produced within **12** months.

Along with the sections completed in the protocol, the following sections will be completed for the full review:

- Plain Language Summary (a brief summary of the review for consumers)
- Abstract

- Description of studies included in the review
- Risk of bias of included studies
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusions
- Summary of findings table

4.1 Training

[Review workshops](#) focussing on analysis methods are available and we encourage you to attend this after protocol submission and work has commenced on the full review. Alternatively, [online learning](#) for this stage of the review process is also available.

At every stage of the review process the staff at the editorial base are available to advise and support review authors. As described above, Natalie Hall, our Information Specialist, will search the relevant trials register for each review and provide advice on any additional searches required. As a Group we have access to a wide range of expertise, both within the CFGD Group and from the global Cochrane community, including Methods Groups for specific issues e.g. the Statistical Methods Group.

4.2 The Editorial Process

The editorial process for the completion of the review is identical to the process described above for protocols. Once your review is published, lead authors (though not co-authors) are entitled to a free subscription to The Cochrane Library, which will be arranged automatically.

5 Updating the review

It is the policy of the CFGD Group that reviews should be updated either annually, or every two years, depending largely on the pace of research in the topic area of the review; please refer to our [updating guidelines](#). We will remind you in good time when your review needs updating. The results of the new search of the relevant trials register will be forwarded with the update request.

Minor amendments (e.g. a statement that a new search has been run and no suitable studies found, a change of contact details, minor corrections etc.) will be carried out after liaison between the review author and Managing Editor. Substantial amendments will require that the updated review to be subject to the same full editorial process as a new review (as described above).

In the event that a review author is unable or unwilling to update a review which the CFGD Group editorial team recognises to be out of date, the review may be withdrawn from The Cochrane Library or passed to a third party to maintain. Authors who do not update their reviews within two years will also lose their free subscription to The Cochrane Library.

Contact details

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