

PATSAFE TOOLBOX No. 10

Template for formulating research questions for systematic reviews

A clearly defined and focused systematic review begins with a well framed research question. Defining the research question is therefore one of the most important steps in performing a systematic review. When the research question is well formulated, all the other steps for performing the review will benefit from this. To facilitate the formulation of the research question, several templates exists that break down the research question into smaller parts. This tool presents the most common template used, the PICO template.

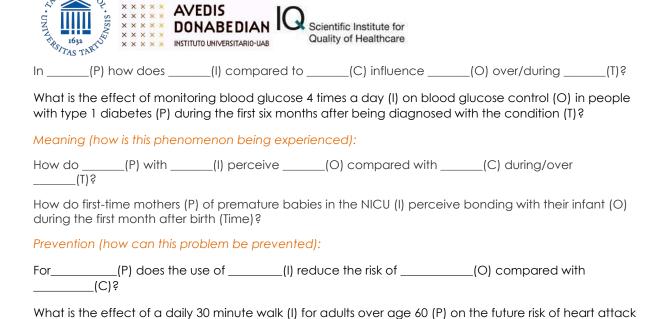
The PICO template

Intervention	Compare	Outcome
	Comparc	Outcome
Indicator	Control	
What is the	Is there a	What are the consequences of the
(e.g.	alternative	intervention that you are
management strategy	intervention you	interested in (e.g. incidents of certain
diagnostic test)	compare to the	symptoms or
•		complications? Also consider how much time it
interested in?	placebo,	takes to demonstrate the
	alternative	outcome.
Viii (rsccy	ntervention e.g. management trategy, diagnostic test) or exposure that	What is the a control or alternative intervention you would like to compare to the intervention or indicator (e.g. placebo,

Examples of different types of research questions formulated according to the PICO template

Therapy or intervention (what should be done to treat this problem):			
In(P), how does(I) affect(O) compared with(C) within(Time)?			
In teenagers (P), what is the effect of a web-based physical activity program (I) on the incidence of obesity (O), compared with no intervention (C) within a 2 year period?			
Etiology or harm (what causes this problem):			
Are(P) who have(I) at(increased/decreased) risk for/of(O) compared with those with/without(C) over/during(T)?			
What is the risk of developing a burn-out (O) in men between 35-45 years (P) who have worked late for three days a week or more (I) compared with men between 35-45 years (P) who work late less than three days a week (C)?			
Diagnosis or diagnostic test (how good is this test at detecting this problem):			
In(P) is/are(I) more accurate in diagnosing(O) compared with(C)?			
Is a multiple choice test (I) more accurate in assessing knowledge gains (O) compared with a test with open-ended questions (C) in university students (P)?			

Prognosis or prediction (what is the likely outcome of this problem):



(O) compared with no daily 30 minute walk (C)?

How to cite this document: PATSAFE (2021). Template for formulating research questions for systematic reviews. PATSAFE Toolbox No. 10.