



Cochrane Collaboration open learning material for reviewers

**Version 1.1
November 2002**

WARNING: These materials were written in 2002. They were revised in 2009 to update links to relevant sections of the latest versions of the Cochrane Handbook and Review Manager software.

While the Open Learning Materials provide a general guide, users must refer to the current version of *The Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* (www.cochrane-handbook.org/) for detailed, up-to-date advice.

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Introduction

Welcome to the Cochrane Collaboration's Open Learning Material for Cochrane reviewers. Performing a Cochrane review requires skills that may be new to you, including the formulation of appropriate questions, literature-searching, critical appraisal, statistical analysis and interpretation and application of your findings. This material is designed to accompany the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* in helping you gain these skills and complete your review. It does NOT replace the *Handbook* (see 'Limitations of materials' section below), instead it acts as a training supplement and provides a framework to progressing through the *Handbook* with examples and activities along the way.

This material will take a step-by-step approach to Cochrane reviews, exploring each step individually, signposting appropriate links and references and providing examples and activities to help you make sense of the information. The material is organised in modules, each module relating to consecutive sections of a review. Review authors may wish to complete each module as they start working on the corresponding part of their review. There are also some additional modules relating to issues that do not occur in all reviews.

Sections of the *Handbook* you need to read, extra references, and activities are listed at the beginning of the module so you know what you will need to complete for that module. These are referenced again in places that are relevant throughout the text of the module. These references are clearly marked in the margin using the symbols below. In electronic versions, the icons in the margin serve as a link to the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* or other reference material. In paper versions they act to guide you to the appropriate place in the reference.

Handbook reference:



Activity:



Reading:



Also in the margin are brief summary notes, highlighting the important learning points.

All the references are freely available, either in the text or on the Internet, excepting the optional reference referred to in Module 6 (and useful to have in general):

[Egger M, Davey Smith G, Altman D \(eds\). *Systematic Reviews in Health Care*. BMJ 2001.](#)

Development of these materials

These Open Learning Materials were developed based on version 4.1.5 of the *Reviewers' Handbook* in 2002. They were compiled using open learning strategies in a collaborative project between several Cochrane Centres and the Cochrane Statistical Methods Group. The Handbook Advisory Group of the Cochrane Collaboration approved these materials for use in 2002.

Editing of materials

The content of these materials has **not been updated since 2002** and should therefore be used with caution. Editing of these materials was conducted in 2009 with the sole purpose of re-aligning references with relevant sections of the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* (Version 5.0.1) and updating information regarding Review Manager 5 software. These changes were intended as a temporary measure only in order to retain the usefulness of these materials while a decision is made regarding the necessary updating and future use of this resource (please see the note below regarding important limitations of these materials as a training resource).

Limitations of materials: An important note regarding the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions*

The materials presented here are intended only as an introduction to some of the key concepts and methodology for conducting Cochrane systematic reviews of interventions. There are significant limitations in the information available in these materials for some methods in the review process, especially 'Risk of bias' assessment and 'Summary of findings' tables. These materials should not be considered as a stand-alone resource, and users must refer to the most recent version of the *Handbook* for the most up to date and comprehensive information for conducting a Cochrane review.

The most recent version of the *Handbook* can be accessed online at www.cochrane-handbook.org/.

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[Chris Silagy wrote his contribution to this material during 2000 while on sabbatical in Oxford. He died in 2001]

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Principles underlying use of this material

Use of this material should adhere to the following set of principles.

- This material, developed by the Cochrane Collaboration for training reviewers, should be freely available to those reviewers with a registered Cochrane review title
- Profits generated from training non-Cochrane reviewers with this material should benefit the Cochrane Collaboration
- Organisations utilising this material within their courses should acknowledge its source
- Any suggestions for the improvement and updating of this material should be sent to the editors so that these suggestions can be considered in future revisions of the material

Revision history

24th February 2003	Corrections made to odds ratio calculations in Module 11.
November 2002	Originally published.
July 2009	References to sections of the Handbook and Review Manager software revised

Core modules

0. Introduction

1. Introduction to systematic reviews

2. Introduction to the Cochrane Collaboration

3. Introduction to meta-analysis

4. Planning a review, format of reviews, introduction to RevMan

5. Writing your protocol: why we have them, what to put in the background section, and defining the question

6. Searching for studies

7. Collecting data from relevant studies

11. Summary statistics for dichotomous outcome data

12. Combining studies

13. Diversity and heterogeneity

14. Further issues in meta-analysis

15. Publication bias

16. Strength and relevance of the evidence

17. Applying the results - tradeoffs, adverse effects and outcomes

18. Applying the results - inferences and uncertainty

19. Maintaining your review

8. Selecting studies for your review

9. Assessing quality of studies

10. Planning the analysis

Additional modules

A1. Meta-analysis of continuous data

A2. Issues related to the unit of analysis