

Bridging the Gap

Information Specialists, Researchers, and Evidence Synthesis

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About Me

- MA in Librarianship
- Chartered Member of The Library and Information Association (CILIP)
- School of Medicine and Population Health, University of Sheffield
- Research Assistant → Information Specialist → Research Fellow
- Systematic Reviews and other evidence synthesis projects
- Information Specialist Team Leader
- Professional Learning Lead



About the School of Medicine and Population Health

- Division of Clinical Medicine and **Division of Population Health**
- 1,500 undergraduate students and **850 postgraduate students** from over 50 countries
- 1,000 members of staff
- Research funding from UK Government, research councils, industrial partners, and charities
- Research themes include clinical trials, **evidence synthesis**, health economics and decision science, health services and social care research, public health



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The Information Specialist Role

- Literature Searching
- Managing References
- Scoping Searches
- Input into research funding proposals and review protocols
- Advice on research questions and review types
- Writing up search methods for journal articles and reports
- Advising students doing literature review projects
- Information Skills Training
- Professional Development for other information specialists/researchers



Some project examples

What is the effect of intergenerational activities on the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people? (*systematic review*)

Barriers and facilitators to the implementation of guidelines in rare diseases (*systematic review – qualitative*)

Unlocking Data to Inform Public Health Policy and Practice (*grey literature*)

Interventions delivered in low- and middle-income country settings to prevent spontaneous pre-term birth (*mapping review*)

Behavioural modification interventions for medically unexplained symptoms in primary care (*systematic review – quantitative and qualitative, and economic evaluation*)

What makes a good information specialist...?

I asked some research colleagues...

- Communication
- Trust
- Understanding
- Respect and appreciation of expertise (on both sides)
- Willingness (to tailor searches, to revise the search strategy)



The librarian magically emerges from the wall. I have seen him before in some old painting. He moves toward me, holding a scroll.

Image by [Krista Kennedy](#) (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

I would add...

- Flexibility
- A “can do” attitude
- Innovation
- Attention to detail
- Good at record keeping!
- An open mind

Things I have learnt...

- Communication is key
- Get involved from the start (where possible)
- Understanding review types is essential
- A broad understanding of literature searching (and how to read a search strategy) helps researchers
- Sometimes researchers can be wary of innovative approaches (choose carefully)
- Don't underestimate the time it takes
- Cut your cloth accordingly and manage expectations
- Peer-review is very helpful!
- A search is never done...
- Support networks are worthwhile
- Be prepared to be a trouble-shooter, a detective, and a reassuring presence

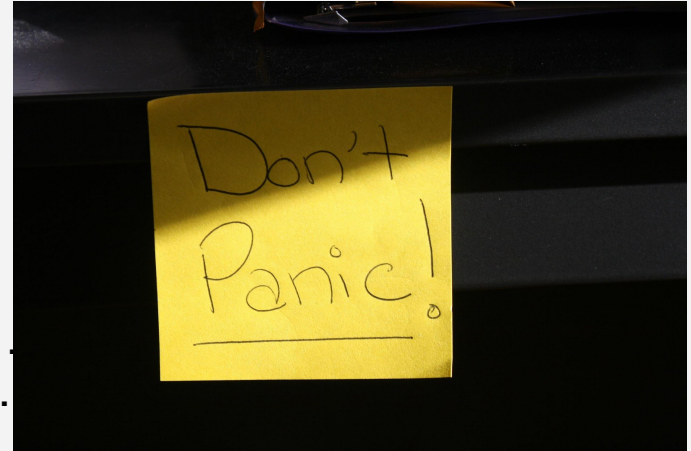
When things go wrong...

Important:

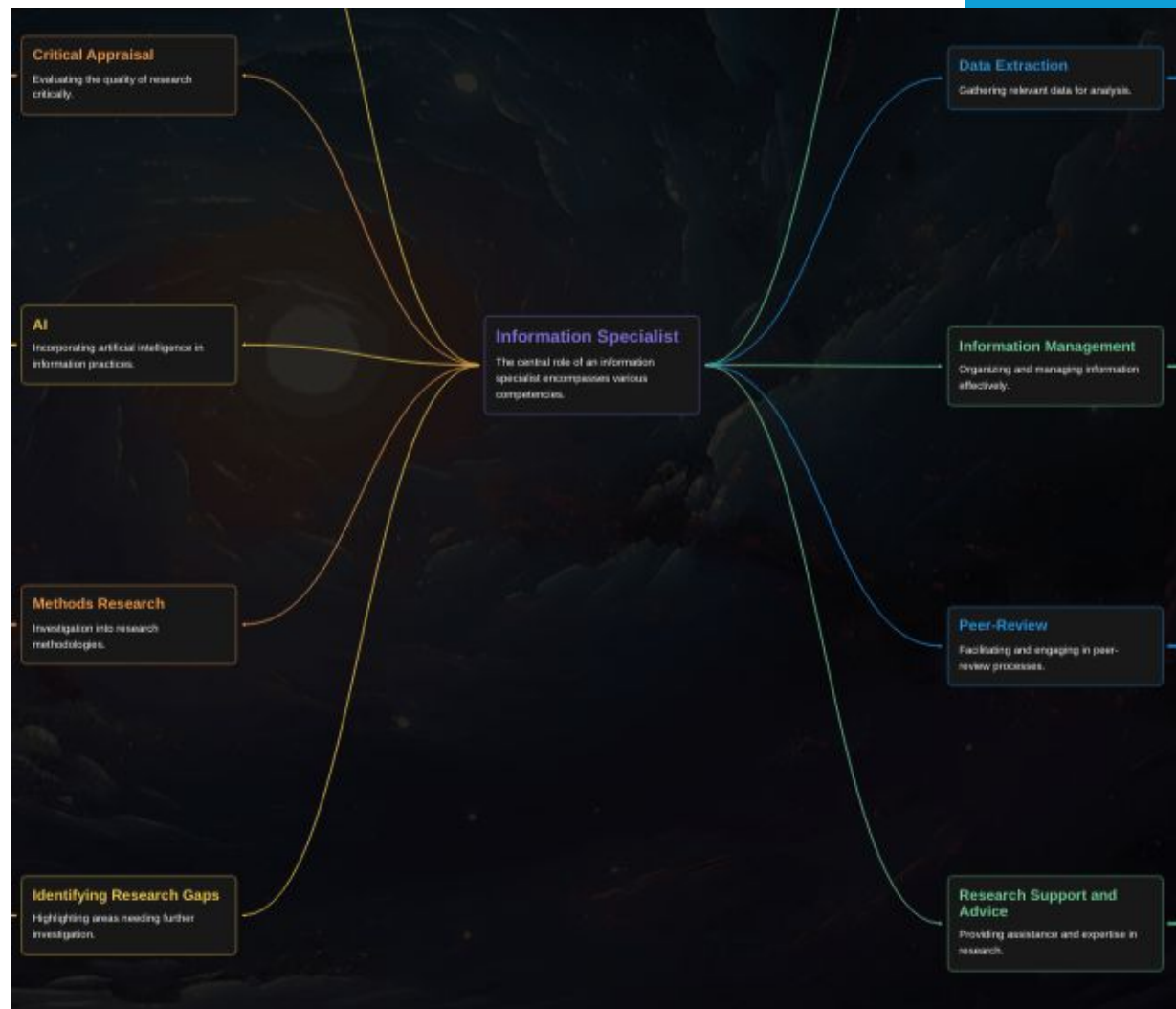
- Don't panic!
- Communicate

Some issues that may arise:

- There is much more literature than you estimated...
- There is much less literature than you estimated...
- You have spotted an error in a search strategy...
- The search has missed a study or studies...
- You have not been given credit for your work...
- You have been asked to update the search unexpectedly...



We have transferrable skills...



Training, support, and keeping up-to-date

- [Systematic Approaches to Searching for Evidence](#) (and other online short courses – bespoke training is available)
- Webinars
- Conferences
- Mailing Lists
- Journal Articles (reading and peer-review)
- Trial of AI tools
- Talk to your peers and colleagues



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Some further reading and resources...

Sutton, A., Clowes, M., Preston, L., & Booth, A. (2019). [Meeting the review family: exploring review types and associated information retrieval requirements.](#) *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 36(3), 202-222.

Spencer, A. J., & Eldredge, J. D. (2018). [Roles for librarians in systematic reviews: a scoping review.](#) *Journal of the Medical Library Association: JMLA*, 106(1), 46.

Levay, P., & Craven, J. (2023). [Systematic searching in a post-pandemic world: New directions for methods, technology, and people.](#) *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 18(4), 93-104.

Gusenbauer, M., & Haddaway, N. R. (2021). What every researcher should know about searching—clarified concepts, search advice, and an agenda to improve finding in academia. *Research Synthesis Methods*, 12(2), 136-147. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jrsm.1457>

Some more...

Pawliuk, C., Cheng, S., Zheng, A., & Siden, H. H. (2024). [Librarian involvement in systematic reviews was associated with higher quality of reported search methods: a cross-sectional survey.](#) *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 166, 111237.

Nussbaumer-Streit, B., Ellen, M., Klerings, I., Sfetcu, R., Riva, N., Mahmić-Kaknjo, M., et al (2021). [Resource use during systematic review production varies widely: a scoping review.](#) *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 139, 287-296.

Ibragimova, I., & Fulbright, H. (2024). [Librarians and information specialists as methodological peer-reviewers: a case-study of the International Journal of Health Governance.](#) *Research Integrity and Peer Review*, 9(1), 1.

Resources on peer-review of search strategies

[PRESS Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies: 2015 Guideline Statement](#)

[Peer reviewing search strategies \(SuRE Info\)](#)

[Adoption of peer review of literature search strategies in knowledge synthesis from 2009 to 2018: An overview](#)

[PRESS forum](#)

Resources on reporting search methods

Rethlefsen, M. L., Kirtley, S., Waffenschmidt, S., Ayala, A. P., Moher, D., Page, M. J., & Koffel, J. B. (2021). [PRISMA-S: an extension to the PRISMA statement for reporting literature searches in systematic reviews](#). *Systematic Reviews*, 10(1), 1- 19. DOI: [10.1186/s13643-020-01542-z](#)

Stansfield, C., Dickson, K., & Bangpan, M. (2016). Exploring issues in the conduct of website searching and other online sources for systematic reviews: how can we be systematic?. *Systematic Reviews*, 5(1), 1-9. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-016-0371-9](#)

Hirt, J., Nordhausen, T., Fuerst, T., Ewald, H., & Appenzeller-Herzog, C. (2024). Guidance on terminology, application, and reporting of citation searching: the TARCiS statement. *BMJ*, 385. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-078384](#)

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