

Search Strategy – Combined PRISMA (Introduction) + Hart (2026) Table 4.3

Front-end planning guide for a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). PRISMA 2020 Introduction items (Rationale, Objectives) are placed first, then Hart's four search phases.

Part A – PRISMA 2020 Introduction (do this BEFORE searching)

These two PRISMA 2020 reporting items frame the whole review. They are recast below into Hart's three-column format (Phase / Stages / Remember to...) so they flow directly into Table 4.3.

Phase	Stages (PRISMA "Elements")	Remember to...
<p>Rationale (PRISMA 2020, Item 3) – "Describe the rationale for the review in the context of existing knowledge."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the current state of knowledge and its uncertainties. • Articulate why it is important to do the review. • If other systematic reviews addressing the same (or a largely similar) question are available, explain why the current review was considered necessary; if it is an update/replication, indicate this and cite the previous review. • If the review examines the effects of interventions, briefly describe how the intervention(s) might work. • <i>If there is complexity in the intervention or its context, consider a logic model to display the hypothesised relationships.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame the gap in terms of HRD theory and practice. • Explain <i>why this review is needed now</i>. • Avoid an unfocused "everything about X" scope – keep it to a problem the literature can actually answer.
<p>Objectives (PRISMA 2020, Item 4) – "Provide an explicit statement of the objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an explicit statement of all objective(s)/question(s) the review addresses, expressed in terms of a relevant question-formulation framework. • If the purpose is to evaluate effects of interventions, use PICO (or a variant) to state the comparisons that will be made. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose the framework that fits your study (PICO/PICOT for effects; CIMO for management/HRD mechanisms; SPIDER for qualitative; PEO, PCC, SPICE for others). • Make each objective answerable and bounded. • Map every framework component to a concept that becomes a search term – this is the bridge into Hart Stage 1.

The framework you choose for **Objectives** (Item 4) is the bridge into Hart's Table 4.3 — its components become the "key concepts" you build search terms from in Stage 2.

Part B — Hart (2026), Table 4.3: The Search Strategy

Phases	Stages	Remember to...
Pre-search research design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the research (review) question is clear and focused on the topic or problem. • Employ a framework to guide your search (e.g., PICOT, CIMO, SPIDER). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take advice from others on the research (review) question. • Use terms from the research question to identify some initial journal titles in the subject area.
Identify concepts and search terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide which key concepts and natural-language words and phrases address the different elements of the research question. • Create a list of synonyms from the concepts and natural-language words and phrases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the concepts from the research question and index terms from articles found in the indicative search to develop a list of search terms.
Search relevant databases and resources for your topic/subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose an appropriate dataset(s). • Use the database to test out the synonyms and natural-language terms to assess their usefulness. • Apply the modified search strategy to other relevant databases and resources. • Join synonyms within a concept using the OR operator; join concepts using the AND operator. • Use database-appropriate syntax, with parentheses, Boolean operators, and field codes. • Search for books using library catalogs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the search process in a text document. • Identify appropriate index terms in the thesaurus of the first database. • Identify additional synonyms in the thesaurus. • Add variations in search terms. • Employ supplementary search techniques.
Evaluate and edit results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort out results, removing duplicates and irrelevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If too many results are retrieved, narrow the search by adding limits such as date, language, journal

Phases	Stages	Remember to...
	sources. • Evaluate the initial results for relevance, bias, and quality.	titles; removing alternative search terms; using more precise search terms; and the hedges — but do not exclude results purely because there are too many. • Establish the citation style to be used and construct bibliographies.

Source: Table 4.3, Hart (2026).

How the pieces connect (for students)

1. **Rationale** → *why* this review matters (the gap).
2. **Objectives** → *what* you will answer, framed with PICO/CIMO/SPIDER.
3. **Pre-search design** → lock the question + framework.
4. **Identify concepts & terms** → turn framework components into concepts → synonyms.
5. **Search databases** → OR within concept, AND across concepts; translate across databases.
6. **Evaluate & edit** → de-duplicate, screen, refine.