

Literature Review & Evidence Synthesis Methods

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A companion to the SLR Search Coach. Once you've built your search strategy, these are the methods and exemplars for actually conducting and writing the review. Curated from the Human Resource Development Review (HRDR) methodology literature, 2016–2026.

Choosing your review type

Not every review is a systematic review. Match the review type to your purpose:

Review type	Use when...	Anchor reference
Integrative review	You want to critique and synthesize a mature literature and generate new framings	Torraco (2016)
Systematic review (SLR)	You need a transparent, reproducible, protocol-driven answer to a focused question	Rocco et al. (2023)
Theoretical review	You are tracing a theory's life cycle (verified/falsified propositions)	Turner et al. (2018)
Conceptual vs. theory article	You are clarifying whether you're building a model or a theory	Rocco, Plakhotnik, & Silberman (2022)

Core reading list (annotated)

Cornerstone — literature review methodology

- **Torraco (2016)** — *Writing integrative literature reviews*. The 11-point checklist; one of HRDR's most-cited. Start here.
- **Rocco, Plakhotnik, McGill, Huyler, & Collins (2023)** — HRD's definitive **structured/systematic literature review** guide.
- **Cho (2022)** — *Distinguishing integrative from systematic reviews* — settles the "which review am I doing?" question.
- **Torraco / Cho / Rocco** together form the HRD literature-review canon.

Software & workflow for reviews

- **O'Kane, Ott, Smith, & Brown (2023)** — CAQDAS for systematic reviews.
- **Paulus (2023)** — QDA software for digital review workflows.

Theory building & "what counts as theory"

- Seo, Noh, & Ardichvili (2019) — HRD theory maturity across 668 articles.
- Lee (2025) — "So what is theory?" — a 4-outcome continuum (concept → model → mid-range → grand).
- Turner et al. (2018) — theoretical literature review; tracing a theory's verified/falsified propositions.
- Kuchinke (2023) — three-criteria framework for selecting supporting literature.

Research rigor, ethics & writing

- Reio (2021) — *Ten Research Questions* — an analytic tool for critiquing studies.
- Reio (2023) — the four Rs: rigor, relevance, replicability, refutability.
- Park, Kim, & Han (2024) — HRD research-method rigor.
- Werner (2022) / Russ-Eft (2018) — academic integrity & the AHRD Standards on Ethics.

How this connects to the SLR Search Coach

1. **SLR Search Coach** → builds your problem statement, framework, and search strategy.
2. **This guide** → helps you pick the review type and conduct/write the synthesis.
3. **Student Toolkit** → the worksheet that captures it all.

Source: HRDR "Research Methodology and Theory Building" cluster.

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