

Be Systematic

The literature search should be as comprehensive as possible. Meta-analysis is best conducted on the population of studies that satisfy a set of search criteria. The search criteria should be clear so that the search can be replicated by others. The aim is to construct a complete dataset that contains comparable estimates of an effect size. It is important to state clearly all sources used and the search criteria. A list of all studies used should be constructed and made available to readers. It is also good practice to construct a list of studies excluded, together with an explanation for the exclusion.

The search process should include: (a) existing narrative reviews; (b) general search engines such as Google Scholar; (c) general citation search engines such as the Social Science Citation Index and Scopus; (d) specialist economics search engines such as EconLit; (e) references cited in the primary studies themselves; and (f) websites of research institutes, such as the World Bank and NBER. In most cases, the search should concentrate on identifying all relevant applied econometric studies (regression-based estimates of an effect).