

Goal	Review Type	Characteristics	
Describing	Narrative review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Broad • Often without a methods section • Search: Usually selective • Sources: Conceptual and empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Narrative summary informed by authorial experience, purposeful selection, and deliberate framing of the literature
Describing	Descriptive review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Broad • Search: Representative • Sources: Empirical and conceptual • Explicit selection: Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Descriptive analysis of meta-data and contents, often with plots or tables of distributions (e.g., journals, methods, levels of analysis)
Understanding	Scoping review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Broad • Search: Comprehensive • Sources: Conceptual and empirical • Explicit selection: Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Content analysis to map emergent research areas and clarify the range, nature, and extent of research
Understanding	Critical review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Broad or narrow • Search: Selective or representative • Sources: Conceptual and empirical • Explicit selection: Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Critical content analysis based on (pre-defined) criteria and constructive suggestions
Explaining	Theoretical review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Broad or narrow • Search: Comprehensive • Sources: Conceptual and empirical • Explicit selection: Yes • Quality appraisal: No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Interpretive methods or inductive analysis (e.g., Grounded Theory), often combined with research propositions or a research agenda
Explaining	Realist review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Narrow • Search: Iterative and purposive • Sources: Conceptual and empirical • Explicit selection: Yes • Quality appraisal: Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Theory-driven and interpretive approaches (mixed methods), aimed to understand mechanisms
Testing	Qualitative systematic review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Narrow • Search: Comprehensive • Sources: Empirical (quant. or qual.) • Explicit selection: Yes • Quality appraisal: Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Tabulating evidence according to pre-defined hypotheses or research models (vote counting)
Testing	Meta-analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Narrow • Search: Comprehensive • Sources: Empirical (quant. only) • Explicit selection: Yes • Quality appraisal: Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Meta-analytic techniques (statistical methods), risk-of-bias reports, analyses of publication bias (forest plots), subgroup analyses
Testing	Umbrella review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope: Narrow or broad • Search: Comprehensive • Sources: Systematic reviews • Explicit selection: Yes • Quality appraisal: Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis: Narrative synthesis, tabulating evidence aggregated by prior reviews