

Systematic review and the hermeneutic circle of literature reviews

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Abstract

Awareness of earlier research is closely related to being aware of existing publications. However, the amount of published material in a field generally exceeds the amount that can be read by individual academics. One way of coping with this situation are review articles. Different types of literature reviews can be distinguished (Garfield, 1987) and recently the concept of systematic review has started to emerge in literature reviews outside medicine (McKibbon, 2006). Systematic reviews aim to provide an overview of the existing literature of relevance to a particular phenomenon following a structured approach.

In contrast this presentation argues that reviewing literature of relevance to a specific problem is an continuing open-ended process. This process can be described by applying the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle describes the process of understanding as an ongoing alternation between the whole and a part. According to this understanding analyzing relevant publications facilitates extended understanding of the body of relevant literature. This in turn enables better identification of relevant publications which can be analyzed again. Understanding the search for literature in the context of the hermeneutic circle provides a framework for introducing different techniques that can be employed when searching for literature. This includes search strategies as well as strategies for filtering records and creating refined search strategies. During this iterative process the stages of searching, selecting, analyzing and refining are repeated until a point of saturation is reached where the hermeneutic circle can be left.

References

- Garfield, Eugene (1987). Reviewing review literature. Part 1, Definitions and uses of reviews. *Current Contents*. 18(May 4). 5-8. [online] <http://www.garfield.library.upenn.edu/essays/v10p113y1987.pdf>
- McKibbon, K. Ann (2006). Systematic reviews and librarians. *Library Trends*. 55(1). 202-215.

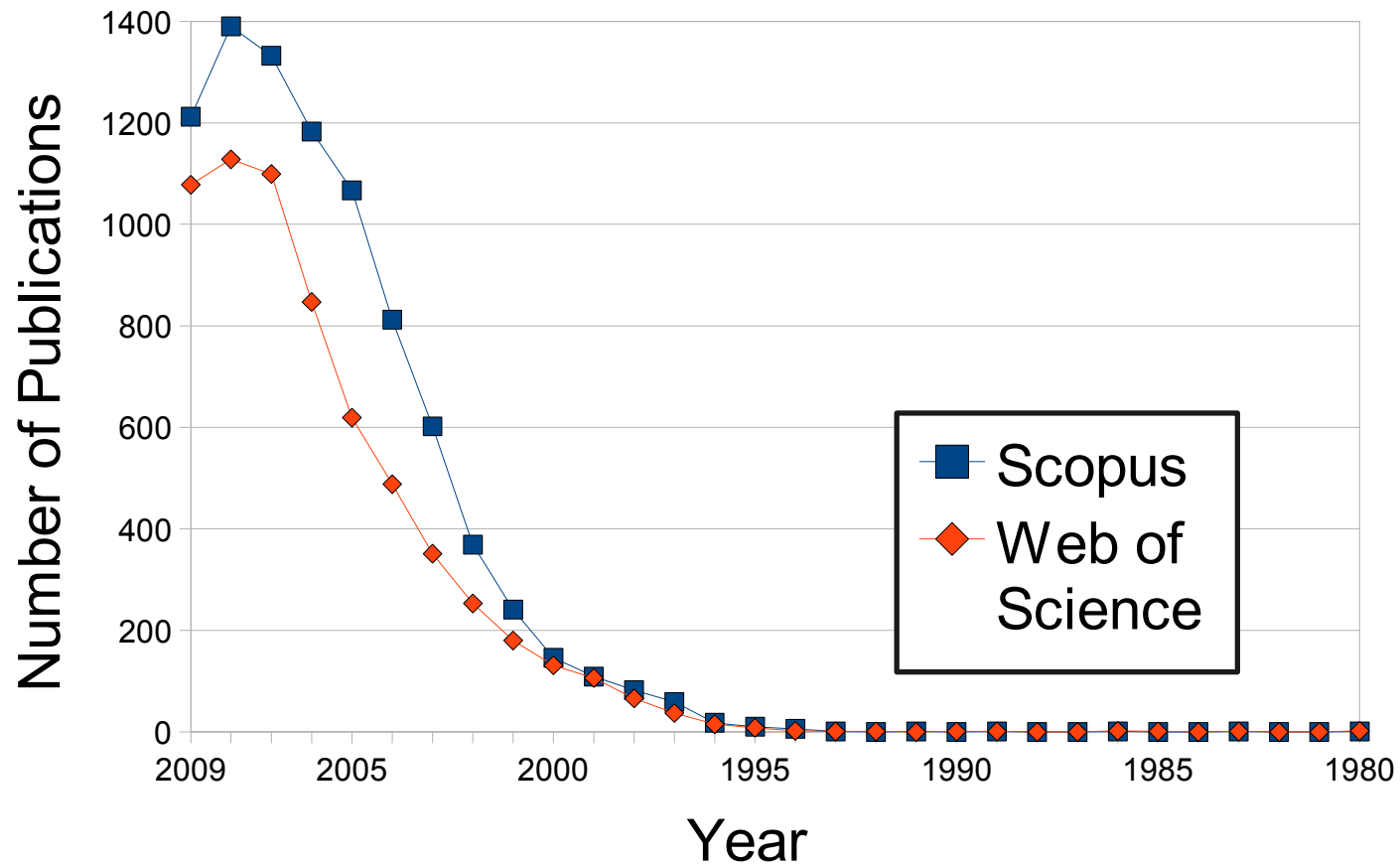
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Literature Reviews

Appearance of the phrase “systematic review” in document titles



Systematic Review (outside Medicine)

Research Question

Search terms

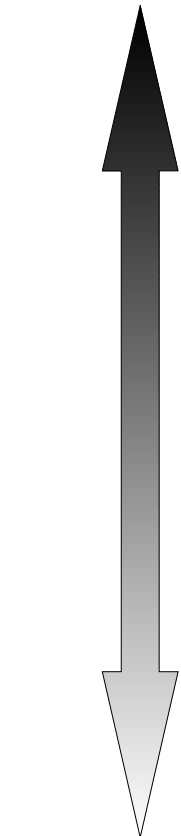
Search

Selection Criteria

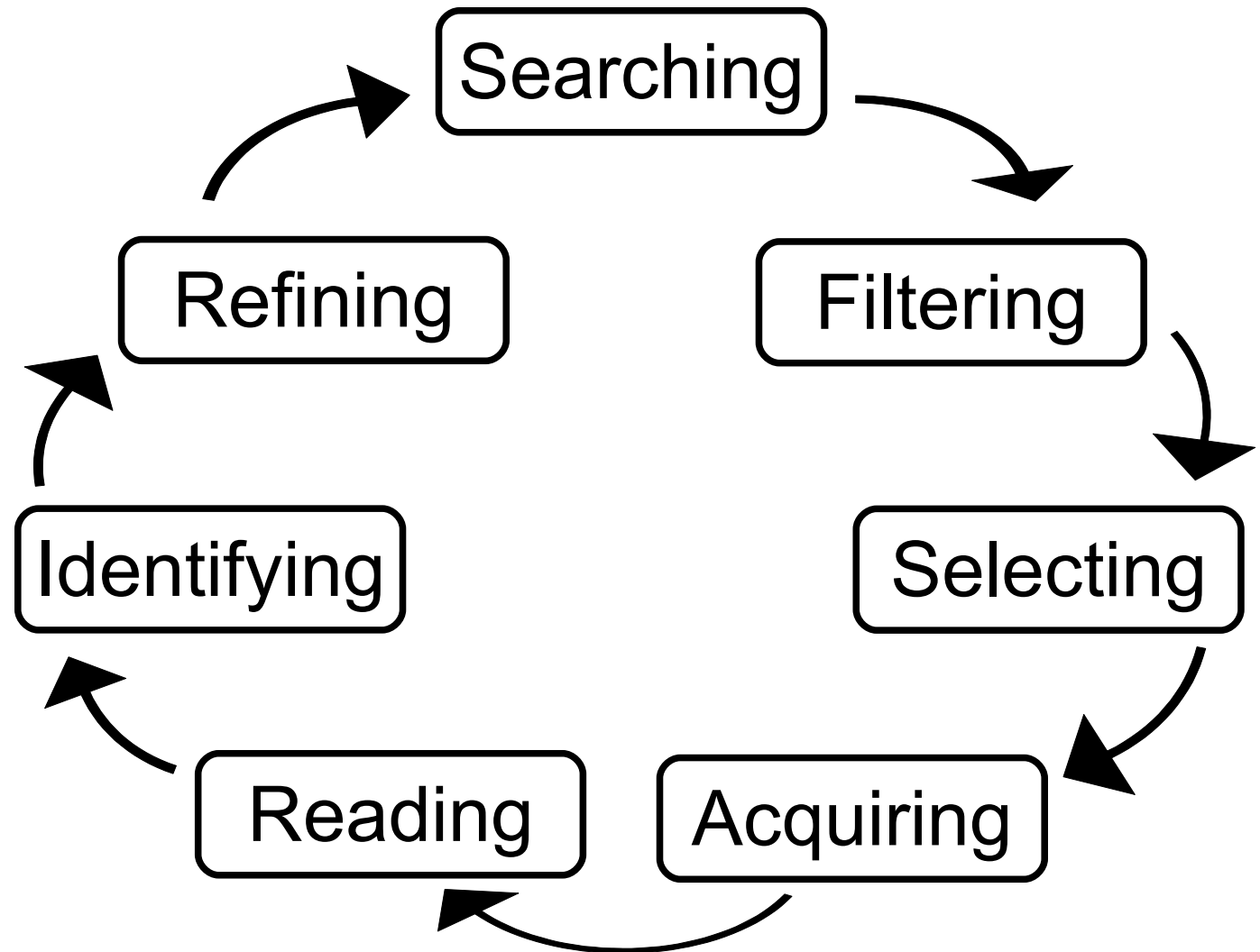
Final review

Hermeneutic Review Process

whole

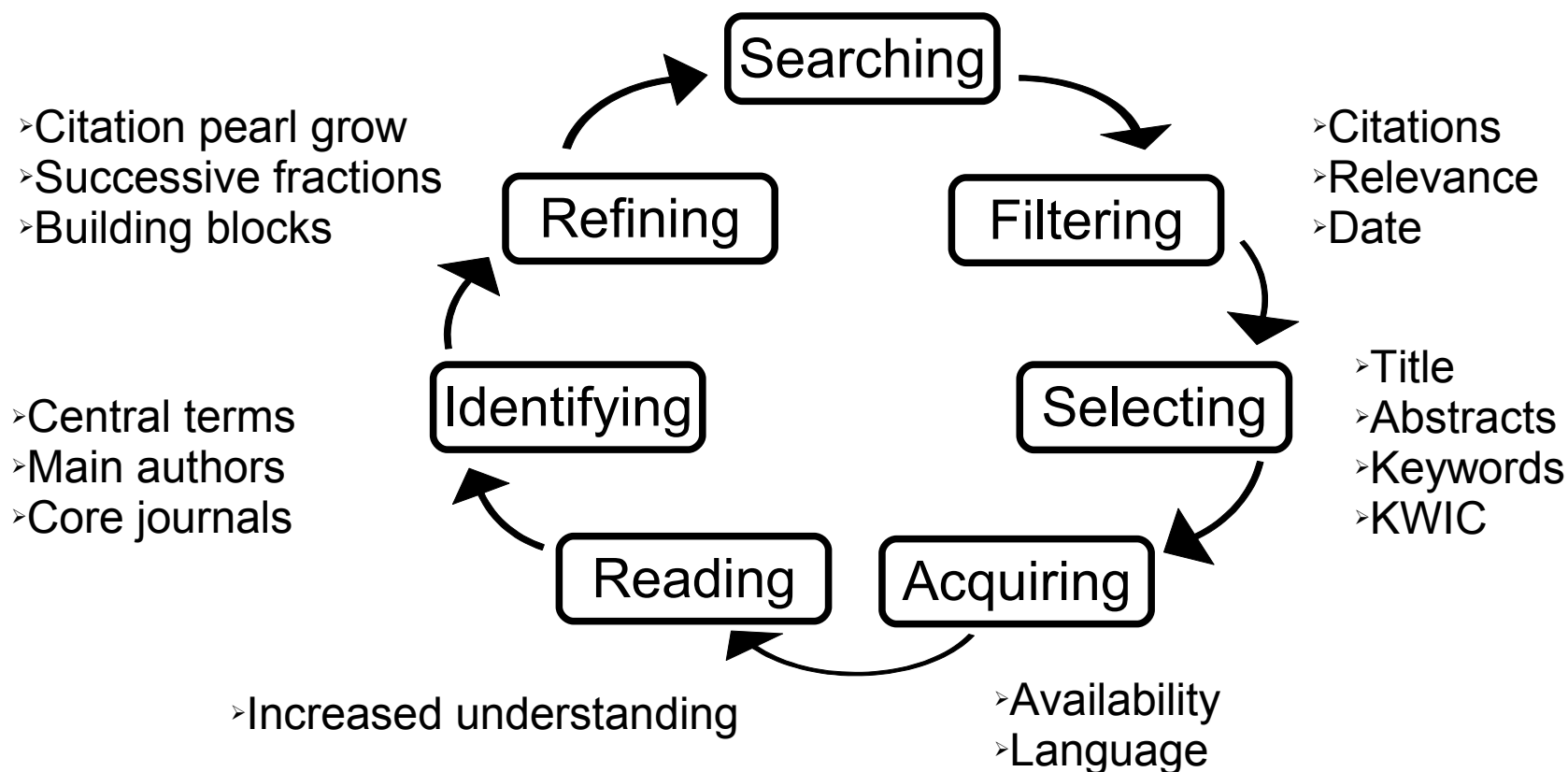


part



Hermeneutic Review Process

- › Search operators (phrases; boolean; brackets; truncations)
- › Field search (year; subject; document type)
- › Data base dependency





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Thank you very much for your attention. Questions, Comments?