

Teach the decision. Keep the evidence.

A suggested 20-minute case for a library workshop, graduate seminar or independent study.

FICTIONAL CASE

A systematic review without a meta-analysis

A team plans to submit a systematic review to PLOS ONE. They report explicit search and screening methods but did not pool results statistically. Their draft has a study-selection flow diagram, no completed PRISMA checklist, and no statement about whether a protocol exists. A colleague says that the journal excludes all reviews and that the team must select Review in the submission system.

Your task. Use sources A and B to correct the colleague, identify the missing submission items, and state what these pages cannot establish. Record a section location for each answer.

Run the session

Preparation: open sources A and B (page 3) and share the two-page learner worksheet. Allow extra time for unfamiliar terms or access barriers.

0-2 min	Read the case Name the difference between article-type eligibility and manuscript readiness.
2-5 min	Open the evidence Locate the exact sections in A and B. Record the owner and the access date.
5-11 min	Make four decisions Answer the prompts on learner page 1, with a source ID and a reason.
11-16 min	Check the answer key Correct one overclaim. Compare the result with the completed record.
16-20 min	Transfer and audit On learner page 2, start one decision for another journal and identify what still needs checking.

This case tests interpretation of published instructions. It does not verify the team's methods, cover every submission requirement, or predict editorial acceptance. Source-checked and inspected in HTML and PDF. Timing is a suggested plan, not a measured learner completion time. No learner-outcome study or institutional endorsement is claimed.

Four decisions, with their limits.

Read the exact sections in A and B. Their access date is 11 September 2026; a later policy change can change the answer.

1 / DOES THE ABSENCE OF A META-ANALYSIS RULE OUT THIS ARTICLE TYPE?

No. This article type may be considered; that is not a readiness decision.

Read A's specific exception alongside B's explanation that statistical pooling is optional. A general exclusion cannot erase its stated exception.

Next action. Check the actual search and selection methods separately. Do not rename a narrative review to evade the condition.

[Source A: Criteria for Publication](#) / [Source B: Submission Guidelines](#)

2 / WHICH ARTICLE CATEGORY DOES THE JOURNAL TELL THIS TEAM TO SELECT?

Research Article, not Review.

Source B distinguishes the name of the study design from the category selected during submission.

Next action. Identify the systematic-review design in the cover letter. Recheck the live menu before submitting.

[Source B: Submission Guidelines](#)

3 / WHAT REPORTING MATERIALS ARE MISSING OR NEED A PLACEMENT CHECK?

Add the completed PRISMA checklist as supporting information; check the flow diagram's placement as Figure 1 where applicable.

Source B specifies both items. A flow diagram alone is not the complete reporting package, and the figure instruction includes an applicability condition.

Next action. Map each applicable checklist item to the manuscript. Check the PRISMA templates linked by the journal; this worksheet is not a replacement checklist.

[Source B: Submission Guidelines](#)

4 / CAN THE TEAM LEAVE PROTOCOL STATUS UNSTATED?

No. The Methods must say whether a protocol exists. If it exists, B asks for a supporting copy and a registry number in the abstract.

This conditional instruction does not establish that every review without a protocol is automatically ineligible.

Next action. Ask the team for the true protocol status. Do not invent a protocol or registration number. If an existing protocol is unregistered, preserve that ambiguity and seek journal clarification.

[Source B: Submission Guidelines](#)

A correct article category is not proof of a sound study. A complete checklist is not a prediction of acceptance.

Make the record reproducible.

Decision	Keep a systematic review under consideration, subject to the methods condition. Select Research Article and prepare the missing PRISMA checklist and protocol-status statement; readiness is not established.
Evidence	A: PLOS ONE, Criteria for Publication, Criterion 1's systematic-review exception. B: PLOS ONE, Submission Guidelines, Systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Checked 11 September 2026; exact URLs are in the source list. Together they establish conditional eligibility and study-type preparation, not manuscript quality.
Action and owner	The submitting author prepares the checklist and checks diagram placement; the methods lead confirms protocol status. Both recheck current instructions before submission.
Unresolved	The actual methods and other applicable submission policies have not been assessed. Public instructions do not determine this manuscript's acceptance.

Review it with four questions

- **Authority.** Can another person open the exact official page and find the section?
- **Scope.** Does the conclusion preserve the source's exception, condition or missing detail?
- **Reasoning.** Are the source statement and the researcher's proposed action separate?
- **Uncertainty.** Is every unresolved item named with a specific next check?

These prompts guide feedback, not a validated skill score. A named unresolved issue is acceptable; an invented rule is not.

Official sources / checked 11 September 2026

Source A: Criteria for Publication

Criterion 1: original research; article types considered; Systematic reviews row.

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/criteria-for-publication>

Source B: Submission Guidelines

Guidelines for Specific Study Types > Systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/submission-guidelines#loc-systematic-reviews-and-meta-analyses>

Teaching basis. [ACRL information-literacy framework](#): contextual authority. This is Manusights' exercise, not an endorsed assessment.

Keep it current. Recheck the two PLOS sections before a session. If an instruction changed, record the change and discuss it instead of grading against an outdated key. If access fails, use the dated paraphrases for a limited interpretation exercise, mark live verification incomplete, and do not call it a current policy check.

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