Differences between a systematic review and a literature review?

- Systematic reviews generally answer focused, PICO-based questions.

- Systematic reviews have a protocol in place including:
  - The clinical question
  - Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria
  - Methods for assessing bias
  - Methods for combining the data (e.g., via a meta-analysis)

- A systematic review is designed to find all relevant materials; a literature review does not follow a pre-specified protocol, nor does it need to be truly “comprehensive”.

- A systematic literature search attempts to reduce bias by searching multiple databases and “grey literature” sources such as unpublished trials.

- Systematic reviews publish, as part of their methods sections, the details of the search strategy. Systematic review literature searches are ultimately replicable; the search strategies (including database names and platforms, dates of the search, all search terms, and any limits used) are published so that others who want to redo the searches can find the same information.

- Regular literature review searches do not need to be replicable or even reported.

- Systematic reviews are often the basis for a meta-analysis, where the data from the materials fitting the pre-specified criteria are pooled and statistically analyzed. Traditional literature reviews do not apply additional statistical methods to the materials found.

- Systematic reviews take exponentially more time to do, from the search strategy creation itself, to going through each retrieved citation in duplicate or triplicate, to analyzing the data from the included articles.

Adapted from Liblog: Newsletter of the Mayo Clinic Libraries, May 1, 2013: http://liblog.mayo.edu/2013/05/01/i-want-to-do-a-systematic-review/