Glossary

Background Question
A single concept question, i.e. what is multiple sclerosis? Often a who, what, where, when question. Used to gain understanding and background information. Best answered using tertiary resources (textbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc...)

Boolean Operators
Operators used to combine terms and phases in databases, i.e. AND, OR...

De-duplication
The process of removing duplicate records. This is done after the results of two or more literature searches from different databases are combined

Explode
A function used to expand a subject heading search to include narrower terms related to the term being considered in a search

Foreground Question
A question that has two or more concepts, i.e. is physical therapy effective for people who have multiple sclerosis?

Grey Literature
Literature that is not usually published in journals and monographs or indexed in commercial databases and catalogues.

Keywords
Natural terms or phrases used in searching, different than subject headings

Protocol
A form you fill out that outlines your research in detail. Typically done for systematic reviews. You also register your protocol with an organization, such as Prospero, to declare your intent of doing a systematic review. It also allows you to see if anyone else has done the similar or exact same systematic review.

Search Filters
A combination of terms and phases used to filter a search to specific group of data, i.e. languages, publication types (randomized controlled trials), aka Hedges.

Sensitivity and Specificity (as related to searching)
Sensitivity refers to searches that capture a wide swath of information on your topic. A side effect of the sensitive search is the results include many unrelated articles. This must happen because in order to capture all the article you need a search broad enough to capture all those articles, this drags in the unrelated articles. Specificity refers to searches that capture articles very specific to your topic. A side
effect of a sensitivity is that some articles important to your search may be missed because the search is too narrow or specific, missing articles because the terms and phases in a specific search are too narrow

Sub-headings
Terms or phases used with subject headings to narrow a search to specific area of study

Subject Headings
Specific terms or phases used to describe a concept. Subject headings must be a controlled vocabulary, that consists of an agreed-upon term to used to describe that concept, i.e. the phrase “heart attack” will be used to describe that concept over myocardial infarction which is synonymous. The subject heading will be applied to an article if a concept is described in an article but that exact concept is not used, i.e. the article uses the term myocardial infarction instead of heart attack, the subject heading heart attack will be given to that articles so a search using the heart attack subject heading will also capture the article that uses the term myocardial infarction.

Study Design
Understanding the domain of a question (i.e. therapy question, diagnosis question, etc.) allows you to determine what type of study designs to look for, i.e. for a therapy question you would look for randomized controlled trials etc.