

## A Summary of Changes to the WWC Handbook

The What Works Clearinghouse's (WWC's) *Procedures and Standards Handbook* was created to document the systematic review process and the standards by which the WWC reviews studies. The original *Handbook*, Version 1.0, created May 2008, was a collection of documents that described WWC processes, standards and technical details that had been developed during the WWC's early years. Version 2.0 of the *Handbook*, released in December 2008, provided an integrated structure for describing the WWC's procedures and standards. In addition, Version 2.0 presented revised standards for attrition in randomized control trials (RCTs) and establishing equivalence in studies that relied on matched comparison group designs. In September 2011, the release of Version 2.1 added pilot standards for the review of studies with regression discontinuity and single-case designs. In February 2013, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) released a draft of Version 3.0 of the *Handbook* for public comment, with proposed revisions to the standards. IES and the WWC's Statistical and Technical Analysis Team (STAT) reviewed comments submitted through the Help Desk and solicited from experts in research design and methodology to develop the final Version 3.0 of the *Handbook*, posted in March 2014. This document describes changes between Version 2.1 and Version 3.0, as well as changes in response to comments on the draft of Version 3.0.

### Changes Between Version 2.1 and Version 3.0

Version 3.0 of the *Procedures and Standards Handbook* is a significant expansion over previous versions. The procedures described in Version 2.1 focused almost exclusively on one WWC product, the [intervention report](#). Version 3.0 provides information on several other key WWC products, which include [practice guides](#), [single study reviews](#), and [quick reviews](#). Throughout the document, examples have been added to illustrate key concepts of WWC standards and how they are applied in the review of studies for each product. Some of the material has been reorganized to better represent the steps of the review process and decisions that are made. Additionally, much of the text has been rewritten or expanded to make Version 3.0 of the *Handbook* clearer to readers.

There is more detail on several statistical and analysis considerations reviewed by the WWC, including specifics on the loss of study sample in RCTs, the demonstration of the similarity of analysis groups, characteristics of outcome measures, and other factors that could affect study findings. Additionally, Version 3.0 includes guidance for three design and analysis issues on which the WWC previously either did not provide explicit guidance or allowed discretion among the different review teams:

- Study designs with students grouped in classrooms or schools
- RCTs in which the chance of being assigned to the treatment group varied across the sample
- Techniques for accounting for missing data in studies

### Response to Comments on the Draft Version 3.0 of the *Handbook*

The draft Version 3.0 *Handbook* proposed modifications to the standards for reviewing randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs. After reviewing the comments with the STAT's methodological experts, IES decided to leave the standards for RCTs and quasi-experimental study designs largely unchanged from Version 2.1. The WWC received many useful comments regarding other aspects of WWC procedures and standards and continues to investigate ways to refine and improve standards.