

How to Write a Literature Review

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Steps to a Lit Review

- Problem formulation:
 - which topic or field is being examined and what are its component issues?
- Literature search:
 - Find materials relevant to the subject being explored
- Data evaluation:
 - determine which literature makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the topic
- Analysis and interpretation:
 - discuss the findings and conclusions of pertinent literature

Evaluate the Literature

- **How do you know what literature to include?**
 - **Example:**
 - Sciences: recent information
 - **Example:**
 - Humanities: survey of the history of X
- **Questions to consider:**
 - Has the author clearly defined the problem/issue?
 - Could the problem have been approached more effectively from a different perspective?
 - Does the author show bias?
 - What is the author's theoretical approach?
 - How good is the study design?
 - How valid are the results?
 - Are there flaws in the logic of the discussion?
 - How does the work contribute to the discipline's understanding of the problem?
 - What problems has the author avoided or ignored?

Adapted from University of Houston-Clear Lake PowerPoint

Keep Track of Sources

- Be organized
- Note cards
- Endnote program
- Other programs like Endnote:
 - Jabref: works with BibTex and LaTeX
 - Mendeley (free)

What is a Literature Review

A Lit Review is NOT

- a report that summarizes articles and books about many different topics
- a research paper
- a list of important research, presented chronologically (in most cases)

A Lit Review

- surveys scholarly articles, books, and journals relevant to your narrow topic.
- provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of each scholarly work.
- provides an overview of the significant literature published on your topic

The Purpose of a Literature Review

- To explain the historical background of a topic
- To describe and compare the schools of thought on an issue
- To synthesize the available research
- To highlight and critique research methods
- To note areas of disagreement
- To highlight gaps in the existing research
- To justify the topic you plan to investigate

Structure

- **Organize according to topic and themes.**
 - Provide context by defining or introducing the problem/issue to be discussed.
 - Identify trends in publications, problems in research, conflicting theories.
 - Establish your purpose in reviewing the literature.
 - Group studies according to commonalities—approach, attitude, findings.
 - Summarize individual studies.
 - Summarize major schools of thought or perspectives.
 - Evaluate the current body of knowledge.
 - Conclude by explaining how your study will add to the body of knowledge.

Common Problems

- **DO NOT:**

- Include every source found
- Include every source in a sequential order
- Summarize without relating the source to the topic
- Organize the discussion in an ineffective manner
- Lose track of sources and spend time searching for them.

Transitions

Transitions help connect paragraphs together

Examples:

- One of the first researchers to investigate this problem is Chen
 - Smith and Jones counter Chen's argument
 - The issue becomes more complex when a third school of thought is considered
 - One researcher who agrees with Chen is
 - A different approach to this question looks at problems in X
 - One of the most troublesome problems is addressed by Green
 - A problem with this approach is that
 - A recent study adds this to the mix
 - A crucial issue that has not been addressed is z
- Adapted from the University of Houston-Clear Lake PowerPoint

Word Choice

Adapted from University of Houston-Clear Lake
PowerPoint

Author is neutral	Author implies	Author argues	Author disagrees	Author agrees
comments	analyzes	contends	disparages	admits
describes	assesses	defends	bemoans	concedes
illustrates	concludes	holds	complains	concur
notes	finds	maintains	deplores	grants
observes	predicts	insists	laments	agrees
points out	speculates	disputes	warns	states

Tips for Success

- Look at other lit reviews in your area of interest or in the discipline
- Clarify the assignment with your instructor
- Keep track of sources
- Give yourself time for multiple drafts
- Have someone in your field read your lit. review
- Use the Writing Center
- www.writingcenter.utah.edu

Example

- Most of the professional and scholarly literature on downtown development has neglected small cities. Frieden and Sagalyn's (1999) widely cited book *Downtown, Inc.* concentrates on large-scale projects in Seattle, Boston, St. Paul, and San Diego, while Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee (1998) profile Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego in their book on downtown design. Almost all the examples provided in Whyte (1988), Abbott (1993), and Robertson (1995) are from large cities, and Brooks and Young (1993) use New Orleans as their case study. The *Downtown Development Handbook* (McBee, 1992), considered by many to be the bible of downtown development, is heavily dependent on projects in large cities to illustrate key points. Articles addressing a particular downtown development strategy such as retailing (Robertson, 1997; Sawicki, 1989), stadiums (Noll & Zimbalist, 1997; Rosentraub, Swindell, Pryzbylski, & Mullins, 1994), pedestrianization (Byers, 1998; Robertson, 1993), and open space (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993; Mozingo, 1989) all emphasize large cities as well. The professional magazine *Urban Land* has published numerous articles on downtown development in recent years, most of which feature a single large city (e.g., Holt, 1998; Howland, 1998; Lockwood, 1996)

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