

Literature Reviews

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Why write a literature review?

A literature review can be used to establish a research agenda – therefore, a good review:

- describes what we know and identifies what we don't know,
- tells a 'story',
- identifies gaps and asks questions rooted in the literature,
- extends and encourages thinking beyond the literature,
- answers the question 'so what?',
- includes seminal works and is representative, if not comprehensive, and
- analyses, synthesizes and interprets.

Preparing

- An iterative, developmental process, a work that ‘unfolds’ – be prepared to draft and redraft, change direction (slightly) refocus, feed in new ideas and sources
- Avoid disruptions in time – keep it fresh and try to do it at once
- Create a frame to start you off
 - What is the general topic? What are some specific strands?
 - What do you know about this topic? Include what you draw from both research and practice.
 - What don't you know? What questions do you have?

Finding the literature

- Mine *State of the Art* articles, *Overviews*, *Reviews*, *Meta-analysis* - content and references
- Identify seminal works
- Identify key journals and authors
- Consider dissertations
- Read the original - avoid secondary sources when the primary is available content and references (e.g.,xxx, 2000 cited in xx, 2010)
- Consider RefWorks or other tool to compile a list in APA
- Establish an organization for your pdfs

Reading and Writing

- Write notes, sentences, paragraphs as you read
- Consider a table to compile information
- Keep notes as you read – reactions, questions arising, connections with other readings
- Look back to your original framework to keep focus

Writing the literature review

Introduction

- Identify area of interest and purpose of review
- Establish scope and criteria for selection of studies
- Define specific terminology and contexts (e.g, ‘ESL’, ‘EAP’)
- Describe why the topic/line of inquiry is important

Body

- determine an organizational framework: theoretical framework, methodology, research focus/question - depending on what you want to uncover
- describe studies one by one OR organize in groups according to common question, methodology, findings
- Include relevant details of studies only.
- interpret rather than take for face value conclusions and findings

Writing the literature review

Conclusion

- Describe your own synthesis of what we know and don't know
- Identify gaps and suggest research directions
- Establish why these are important

Language

- Qualify your statements conservatively, e.g., *To my knowledge, limited research, less has been written about, a dearth in the literature*
- Avoid overly critical, personalized, dismissive language
- Attend to plagiarism - cite according to APA

Recommended -

