WRITING THE LITERATURE REVIEW

"Piles of these materials are stacked all around, on desks, tables, and floor, and they [students] have diligently read their way through most of them, taking copious notes—computers bulge with information and threaten to explode"

~Irene L. Clark, *Writing the Successful Thesis and Dissertation*

Goals

- To better understand

  - What a literature review is

  - How to organize a lit review

  - How to revise a lit review

  - What sources are available for help in writing

Literature Review ...

- A critical analysis of existing research in your field; it highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of existing research

- Allows you to gain a critical understanding of your field

- Opportunity to think about what has been done in your field; opportunity to think about the similarities, patterns, trends and also differences across the existing research

- By identifying strengths and weakness, you will be able to think about what has not/needs to be done in your field

- The gap in the literature is your justification for your research

A literature review . . .

- "[I]s an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers" (Dena Taylor, Director, Health Sciences Writing Centre,and Margaret Procter, Coordinator, Writing Support, University of Toronto).

- "[D]iscusses published information in a particular subject area, and sometimes information in a particular subject area within a certain time period" (University of North Carolina website).

- "[I]s a body of text that aims to review the critical points of current knowledge on a particular topic" (*Wikipedia* 3-19-07).

Comprehensive Definition

"A Literature Review Surveys scholarly articles, books, and other sources (e.g., dissertations, conference proceedings) relevant to a topic. . . . Its purpose is to demonstrate that the *writer* has insightfully and critically surveyed relevant literature on his or her topic in order to convince an intended *audience* that the *topic* is worth addressing"

~from *Writing the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Entering the Discussion*

By Irene L. Clark

A literature review is NOT . . .

- An annotated bibliography
- A list of seemingly unrelated sources
- A literary survey containing author's bio, lists of works, summaries of sources
- Background information or explanations of concepts
- An argument for the importance of your research (although the LR can and often does support your position)

Prewriting Stages

- <u>Formulate the problem or primary research question</u> — which topic or field is being examined and what are its component issues?

- <u>Choose literature</u> — find materials relevant to the subject being explored and determine which literature makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the topic .

- <u>Analyze and interpret</u> — note the findings and conclusions of pertinent literature, how each contributes to your field .

Why Write?

- **To tell others what you have learned:**
  1. **what you have learned from reading & thinking**
     - literature review: what <u>others</u> have learned
       - also useful for dissertation proposal & dissertation
     - keep a reading journal:
       - for each article or book, do:
         - <u>record</u> all bibliographic info
         - <u>copy</u> interesting or important passages
         - <u>comment</u> on them:
           * why are they interesting or important?
           * what do they remind you of?
           * take their ideas further

Why Write?

2. **What you have learned by discovering it yourself**
   - outline your research
   a) What problem are you trying to solve?
   b) Why is it important?
   c) What recent advances or interesting ideas are there?
      - what have others done?
      - what have others not done yet?
      - literature review!
   d) What have you done (so far)?
   e) What is your next step?
      - how does it relate to your goal?
      - why is it important?
   f) How will you know when …
      - you've made progress?
      - you're done?

Reading critically

Think about:

- What were the research aims of the paper/book?

- Is the research aim achieved? If so, how did they do it?

- Are there any problems with their methodology?

- Was it a strong or a weak research model?

- How will this research help with your own research?

- What can you take from it?

- What needs to be avoided?

- What are you doing differently?

Organizing/Outlining

Methods for organizing the Lit Review

- By subject (if lit review covers more than one subject)

- Chronologically

- By theme, idea, trend, theory, or major research studies

- By author

- By argumentative stance

In all methods, relationships between elements (e.g., subject, theme, author, etc.) must be shown.

Writing the LR

- Ongoing "housekeeping" strategies and tips

  - Immediately document and cite source you took the information from.

  - Bookmark online sources.

  - Bookmark "hard copy." Use post-it notes to mark pages with relevant information.

  - Keep track of page numbers or online locations of paraphrases and quotations.

  - Note any connections between sources in separate notebook, electronic file or post-its on pertinent pages.

  - If information comes from a class lecture, interview, or conference, note details immediately.

Beginning the Writing

- Introduce your LR by
  - Defining or explaining the primary problem addressed by the lit review, or if the LR is part of a larger work like a thesis or dissertation, explain the problem it addresses.

  OR
  - Explaining main conflict(s) in the literature

  OR
  - Explaining the time frame you will review

  OR
  - Offer a rationale for your choice of source material

  OR
  - Using all or some of the points above.

- A Lit Review must have its own thesis .

Body of the LR

- Use subheadings if dividing the LR topically, thematically, according to argumentative perspective, or according to time period.

- Be sure to show relationships between sources.

- Discuss source's significant contributions.

- Do not develop ideas or use sources that are irrelevant to your thesis overall.

- References to prior studies should be in past tense; references to narrative or text other than studies should be in present tense.
  - Example: Ahmed's study of e-learning included both on contents and assessment subjects. He concludes that … . He also suggests that further studies should look ……., a variable his study did not consider.

How to Write

- **Write!**

  - 2 ways to write:

    1. make an outline

    2. "free" writing

- **Edit!**

How to Write

- Make an outline:

  - based on sorting your notes in reading journal
  - or based on your research outline

  - <u>intro</u>   <u>topic-1</u>   <u>topic-2</u>   <u>topic-3</u> <u>conclusion/summary</u>

    idea-1

    * sub-idea-1.1

    * sub-idea-1.2, etc.

    idea-2, etc.

  - use these as section headings

How to Write

- "Free" writing:

  - sit down & write

  - let the ideas "flow"

  - _not_ (necessarily) recommended for beginners!

How to Write

- Keep your audience (readers) in mind:

    - what assumptions can you make?

    - avoid jargon / technical terms!

How to Write

- **Edit!**
  - **Re-read** what you wrote
    - slowly & actively
    - be critical
      - imagine what questions others might have
      - get feedback from others
  - **Revise**
  - **Repeat!**

How to Format

- Depends on whom it's for:

  - course instructor?

  - major professor?

  - conference?

- Each will have their own rules

How to Format

- General rules for formatting:
  - 8.5" x 11"   (not A4)
  - 1" margins   (all 4 sides)
  - single-sided   (unless need to save paper)
  - double-spaced   (easier to proofread)
  - indent paragraphs
  - number all pages

How to Format

▫ Order of contents:

1. **Title & identifying info**
   a) descriptive title; "catchy" subtitle
   b) your name
   c) your institution (or course name)
   d) date
2. **Abstract**
   – 1-paragraph summary
3. **Body of paper**
4. optional:
   a) Acknowledgments
   b) Appendix
   c) Endnotes   (footnotes are better!)
5. **References**   (in alphabetical order!)

Citations

- Give enough info for reader to find document

- Actual format not important
  - unless publisher / instructor says so!

Citations

- For journal article:

  Familyname, Givenname (year), "Title", *Journal* vol: firstpage–lastpage.

  - For example:

    Rapaport, William J. (1986), "Logical Foundations for Belief Representation", *Cognitive Science* 10: 371–422.

Citations

- For book:

  Familyname, Givenname (year), *Title* (city: publisher).

  - For example:

    Schagrin, Morton L.; Rapaport, William J.; & Dipert, Randall D. (1985), *Logic: A Computer Approach* (New York: McGraw-Hill).

Concluding the LR

- **Summarize** ideas, conflicts, themes, or historical (or chronological) periods.

- **Contextualize** your topic within the summary.

- **Point out gap(s)** in scholarship and, show how your research helps fill the gap(s).

- **Transition** to your next chapter.

Revising the LR: Questions to Ask Yourself

- Have I accurately represented the author's views?

- Is source material research current and relevant to thesis topic?

- Are all major theorists, scholars, or studies represented?

- Have I shown relationships between sources?

- Is there a clear connection between thesis topic and the LR?

- Are all sources documented accurately?

- Have I used effective transitions from idea to idea, source to source, paragraph to paragraph?

- Is my analysis of sources well developed?

- Have I represented all conflicts or argumentative sides fairly?

Any Questions???