

Writing Literature Reviews and Research Proposals

Galvan, Jose L. 1999. *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences*. Los Angeles, CA: Pycszak Publishing.

Information Sources

- Primary (empirical) sources*****
 - original; empirical; first published account
 - details on methodology, findings, and discussion
 - systematic observation (carefully planned)
- Secondary sources
 - found in books, magazines, newspapers
 - global descriptions of findings

3 Potential Problems with Empirical Research

- Sampling
 - unrepresentativeness
 - sampling bias
- Measurement
 - flawed instrumentation (surveys, interviews, observation, experimentation)
 - multiple measures -- consistent results?
- Problem identification
 - researchers studying same problem might examine different specific (narrow) areas of the problem

Other Sources

- Theoretical articles
 - theory built on existing empirical work
 - pieces of theory can be tested empirically
 - follow up on leads in bibliography
- Literature review articles
 - new and fresh insights that advance knowledge
 - resolve conflicts in articles that contradict each other
 - identify new ways to interpret results
 - lay out a path for future research/generate propositions
- Antecdotal Reports (do NOT use these)

Writing Process

- Planning
 - defining a topic and selecting literature
- Organizing
 - analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating review articles
- Drafting
 - writing a first draft of the review
- Editing
 - checking draft for completeness, cohesion, correctness
- Redrafting

Questions to Ask in Evaluating an Empirical Article

- Are there obvious sampling problems?
- Are there obvious measurement problems?
- Is the problem narrow enough? Too narrow?
- Are there any other flaws in the paper?
- Does the research make an important contribution to advancing knowledge?

Questions to Ask in Evaluating Review Articles

- Have the reviewers clearly identified the topic of review?
- Have the reviewers indicated its delimitations (time period, aspects of the problem, etc)?
- Have the reviewers written a cohesive essay that guides you through the lit from topic to topic?
- Have the reviewers interpreted the literature (as opposed to summarizing)?
- Did the reviewers make an important contribution?

Identifying Literature

- Search an appropriate database
 - can start with general topic
 - better to start with more specific topic, but can narrow down a general topic after seeing list of articles
- Shorten list to a manageable size
 - which articles pertain to your major field of study?
 - reclassify articles in the list
 - is the journal respected in your field?

Additional Steps to Get Started

- Write the first draft of your topic sentence
 - name the area you will investigate, in general
 - after examining more focused list of articles
- Pick on-line databases that are appropriate for your topic
- As you search databases for articles and narrow your search, redefine your topic more narrowly.
- Start with the most current and work backwards

Synthesizing Literature

- 1. Decide purpose and voice
 - Purpose:
 - term paper, dissertation/thesis, journal article?
 - Voice:
 - formal, de-emphasize self, avoid first person (usually)
- 2. Consider how to reassemble your notes
 - **NOT** a series of annotations of research studies
 - describe the forest (not the trees) from a unique perspective using the trees you found
 - how do the pieces relate to each other?

Develop a Coherent Essay

- Remember: this is not an annotated bibliography (a series of connected article summaries). Review should have a clearly stated argument, developed in such a way that all elements work together to communicate a well-reasoned account of argument
- 1. Describe review outline for reader
 - introductory paragraphs should include roadmap of where you are going in paper
- 2. Near beginning, state what will and won't be covered

Develop a Coherent Essay

- 3. Specify your point of view early
- 4. Aim for a clear and cohesive essay; avoid annotations
- 5. Use transitions to help trace your argument
 - e.g., first, second, third

Formatting Notes

- Do not use first person (I, me, my, etc.)
- Use one-inch margins throughout
- Use Time New Roman 12-point fonts
- Be sure all of your cites are in reference list
- Reference List must be double-spaced, in alpha order, with first line of each indented five spaces to the left of the other lines