

Writing Literature Reviews and Research Proposals

Adapted from:

Galvan, J. L. 1999. *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences*. Los Angeles, CA: Pyczak 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
- Anecdotal 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

- The first assignment is a bibliography (a series of connected article summaries). Your other papers 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 the beginning, state what will and won't be covered
 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 Times 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