

# 2017 Summer Institute

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## Writing Your Literature Review

*Information adapted from presentations by  
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# Overview

- ▶ What is a Literature Review?
- ▶ Primary vs. Secondary Sources
- ▶ Creswell's 5 Steps to Conducting a Literature Review
- ▶ Writing a Literature Review
- ▶ *Note: The Library sessions during the SI will cover how to search for appropriate resources.*

# What is a Literature Review?

- ▶ According to Creswell (2008), a review of the literature “is a written summary of journal articles, books and other documents that describes the past and current state of information, organizes the literature into topics and documents a need for a proposed study.” (p. 88)

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

# What is a Literature Review (LR)?

- ▶ The literature review provides the reader current information regarding the status of research in the field.
- ▶ The purpose of the LR is to inform the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic and what are the strengths and weaknesses.

## Reasons for conducting a LR

- ▶ To see what has and has not been investigated.
- ▶ To develop general explanation for observed variations in a behavior or phenomenon.
- ▶ To identify potential relationships between concepts and to identify researchable hypotheses.
- ▶ To learn how others have defined and measured key concepts.
- ▶ To identify data sources that other researches have used.
- ▶ To develop alternative research projects.
- ▶ To discover how a research project is related to the work of others.

# Articles in the LR

Review all of the articles and highlight the following:

- ▶ The theme
- ▶ The problem the author(s) are addressing
- ▶ The solution they used to solve it
- ▶ Some important or unique quotes (with page numbers). Use this rarely.
- ▶ The data presented

# Primary vs. Secondary sources

- ▶ Primary Source
  - ▶ The author's original work or research reported by the researcher that conducted the study.
- ▶ Secondary Source
  - ▶ Work cited by another author or research that summarizes or reports findings that come from primary sources.
- ▶ What's wrong with using secondary sources?

# Key Elements of Creswell's Definition

- ▶ The LR is a summary of research:
  - ▶ It is not a "list" of found research but a coherent and articulate account of past and current research findings.
  - ▶ Suggestion: read two or three LRs in order to become familiar with summary styles.

# Key Elements (cont'd)

- ▶ The sources typically are journal articles, books and other documents that describe past and present status of research in a given field:
  - ▶ The LR should be exhaustive and as current as possible.
  - ▶ How many articles?
    - ▶ 30 peer-reviewed journal articles
    - ▶ Aim for @ 30 sources in Chapter 2

# Key Elements (cont'd)

- ▶ How far back should one search?
  - ▶ A reasonable and widely accepted timeframe includes research conducted during the past 5-10 years. Important studies (i.e., studies that had a significant impact on the field of study) should also be mentioned even if these go beyond the mentioned timeframe.

# Key Elements (cont'd)

- ▶ The LR should be organized:
  - ▶ The review should not only be coherent, but should organize the studies reviewed under themes or topics.
  - ▶ The reviewer is a guide and should be able to provide readers with an in-depth and current status of research in a given area.
  - ▶ This aspect is essential for readers to understand what the reviewer found during the search.

# Key Elements (cont'd)

- ▶ The LR should document the need for a proposed study:
  - ▶ Studies should not duplicate research that has been already done.
  - ▶ Even in cases when research is replicated, one is responsible for documenting the need for replication (e.g., need to explore the same methodology with a different group or population, or need to change methodology with the same group).

# Key Elements (cont'd)

When reviewing each article, look at:

- ▶ The content
- ▶ How it relates to your problem statement and research questions
- ▶ Whether it's peer reviewed
- ▶ The reliability of the data
- ▶ The conclusions drawn

# Key Elements (cont'd)

- ▶ Review the relevance of your articles.
- ▶ Throw out those that don't apply.
- ▶ Get ready to sort those that remain.
- ▶ Group the articles by:
  - ▶ SUBJECT
  - ▶ POSSIBLE CAUSES for your problem
  - ▶ INTERVENTION / INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

# Key Elements (cont'd)

Start to resemble the articles:

- ▶ Find those authors who said the same thing; note them together.
- ▶ Make sure your literature review is not one article after another, but a synthesis of all you read, logically moving from subject to another.

# Literature Review in a Quantitative Study

- ▶ Documents the importance of the research problem at the beginning of the study.
- ▶ Supports the theory or explanation used in the study.
- ▶ Foreshadows the research questions.
- ▶ Provides an explanation for the results in other studies and in the theoretical prediction at the end of the study.

# Literature Review in a Qualitative Study

- ▶ Documents the importance of the research problem at the beginning of the study.
- ▶ Does not foreshadow the research questions (which are broad in scope to encourage participants to provide their own views).
- ▶ Is used to compare and contrast with other studies at the end of the study.

Creswell , J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

# A literature review will help you...

- ▶ Document the need for your study
- ▶ Become an expert on the topic
- ▶ Become a good researcher
- ▶ Identify a purpose and research questions
- ▶ Find and include all relevant constructs
- ▶ Find and select instruments
- ▶ Anticipate common problems

# Creswell's 5 steps to Conducting a Literature Review

- ▶ Step 1: Identify Key Terms or "Descriptors"
- ▶ Step 2: Locate Literature
- ▶ Step 3: Critically Evaluate and Select Literature
- ▶ Step 4: Organize the Literature
- ▶ Step 5: Write a Literature Review

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# Identify Key Terms or “Descriptors”

- ▶ Extract key words from your title (remember, you may decide to change the title later).
- ▶ Use some of the words other authors reported in the literature.
- ▶ Use the “Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors to look for terms that match your topic: go to [www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov) and in “Search” select “Descriptors (from Thesaurus)” .
- ▶ Scan both electronic and library journals from the past 10 years and look for key terms in the articles.

## Step 2: Locate Literature

- ▶ Use academic libraries, do **NOT** limit your search to an electronic search of articles.
- ▶ Use primary and secondary sources, but mostly primary sources.
- ▶ Search different types of literature.

# Sources for Conducting a Literature Review

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- ▶ Journal articles
  - ▶ offer a relatively concise and up-to-date research.
  - ▶ are refereed (i.e., editors publish only the most relevant and reliable research).

# Sources for Conducting a Literature Review (cont'd)

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## ▶ Books

- ▶ may not be up to date.
- ▶ may not be useful for inclusion in a literature review (textbooks in particular).
- ▶ are intended for teaching, not for research.
- ▶ offer a good starting point in finding more detailed sources.

# Sources for Conducting a Literature Review (cont'd)

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- ▶ Conference proceedings
  - ▶ very useful in providing the latest published and unpublished research.
  - ▶ helpful in providing information about other researchers and their scholarly activities.

# Sources for Conducting a Literature Review (cont'd)

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- ▶ Government and corporate reports
  - ▶ Governmental departments, corporations, and commissions may carry out research.
  - ▶ Their published findings can provide a useful source of supporting information.

# Sources for Conducting a Literature Review (cont'd)

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- ▶ Newspaper articles
  - ▶ provide information that is of very limited use in a literature review.
  - ▶ may be more helpful as providers of information about recent trends, discoveries, or changes.

# Sources for Conducting a Literature Review (cont'd)

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- ▶ Theses and dissertations
  - ▶ can be difficult to obtain because they may be unpublished and available only from the library shelf or through interlibrary loan.
  - ▶ represent the work of students who may not be experienced researchers.
  - ▶ should be considered with greater caution than published research.

# Sources for Conducting a Literature Review (cont'd)

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- ▶ The Internet
  - ▶ Anyone can post information on the Internet, so the quality may not be reliable.
  - ▶ The information may be intended for a general audience and, therefore, may not be suitable for inclusion in a literature review.
  - ▶ The quality of some refereed electronic journals may be more reliable (depending on the reputation of the journal).

# Sources for Conducting a Literature Review (cont'd)

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- ▶ Magazine articles
  - ▶ Magazines intended for a general audience (e.g., *Time*) are unlikely to be useful in providing the type of information that a researcher needs.
  - ▶ Specialized magazines may be more useful (e.g., business magazines for management students).
  - ▶ Magazines may be useful as a starting point for research.

# Critically Evaluate and Select Literature

- ▶ Is it a good, accurate source?
  - ▶ Rely on journal articles published in national journals.
  - ▶ Prioritize your search: first look for refereed journal articles, then, non-refereed articles, then books, then conference papers, dissertations and theses and then papers posted to websites.
  - ▶ Look for research articles and avoid as much as possible “opinion” pieces.
  - ▶ Blend qualitative and quantitative research in your review.

# Critically Evaluate and Select Literature (cont'd)

- ▶ Is it relevant?
  - ▶ Topic relevance
  - ▶ Individual and site relevance
  - ▶ Problem and question relevance
  - ▶ Accessibility

# Organize the Literature

- ▶ Create a “file” or “abstract” system to keep track of what you read. Each article you read should be summarized in one page containing
  - ▶ Title (use APA to type the title so that you can later copy-paste this into the References section of your paper).
  - ▶ Source: journal article, book, glossary, etc.
  - ▶ Research problem: one or two lines will suffice.
  - ▶ Research Questions or Hypotheses.

# Step 4: Organize the Literature (cont'd)

- ▶ Data collection procedure (a description of sample characteristics can be very handy as well)
- ▶ Results or findings of the study
- ▶ Sort these abstracts into groups of related topics or areas which can then become the different sections of your review.

# Step 4: Organize the Literature (cont'd)

Create a topic outline:

- ▶ Have headings (which will become your 2nd and 3rd level headings)
- ▶ Move logically from one subject to the next
- ▶ Group authors who made the same claims
- ▶ Note opposing views
- ▶ Note most commonly used methodologies to study similar problems
- ▶ Offer a summary

# Step 4: Organize the Literature (cont'd)

- ▶ Take your outline and expand it to text form
- ▶ Writing Suggestions:
  - ▶ Have strong topic sentences
  - ▶ Use 2nd level headings as needed and 3rd level headings when your topic has subtopics
  - ▶ Have transitions between each paragraph
  - ▶ Stay focused on the problem statement
  - ▶ Keep your opinions out of the document
  - ▶ Write the literature in the past tense

# Step 5: Write a Literature Review

- ▶ Types of Reviews:
  - ▶ **Thematic Review:** a theme is identified and studies found under this theme are described. Major ideas and findings are reported rather than details.
  - ▶ **Study-by-study Review:** a detailed summary of each study under a broad theme is provided. Link summaries (or abstracts) using transitional sentences. Must be organized and flow coherently under various subheadings. Avoid string quotations (i.e., lengthy chunks of text directly quoted from a source).

# Keys to writing a good lit review

- ▶ Remember the purpose
- ▶ Read with a purpose
- ▶ Write with a purpose
- ▶ Plan your writing
- ▶ Prioritize your writing
- ▶ Write and rewrite
- ▶ Find readers

# Remember the purpose

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- ▶ use the literature to explain your research.
- ▶ show why your research needs to be carried out.
- ▶ show how you choose to work with specific methodologies or theories.
- ▶ show how your work adds to the research already carried out.

# Read with a purpose

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- ▶ When summarizing the literature, you must also decide which ideas or information are important to your research (i.e., so that you can emphasize them).
- ▶ You should also look for the major concepts, conclusions, theories, and arguments that underlie the literature.
- ▶ Look for similarities and differences with closely related work.

# Write with a purpose

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- ▶ Your optimal goal should be to evaluate and show relationships between past research and your own.
- ▶ To do this effectively, you should carefully plan how you are going to organize your work.
- ▶ A chronological system will not be an effective way to organize your work (in some situations).

# Plan your writing

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- ▶ Find a way to organize your material so that you know what you are going to write about, in what order, and what you are going to say.
- ▶ Try writing an outline.

# Prioritize your writing

- ▶ When you plan your writing, don't be overly concerned about language. Concentrate on what you are going to say.
- ▶ Don't put too much effort into proofreading until you are sure that what you want to say is the best you can come say.
- ▶ Once the content is sufficiently expressed, you can work on grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling, and so forth.

# Write and rewrite

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- ▶ More experienced writers rewrite more often and more substantially than less experienced writers.
- ▶ Good writing takes time. The better a writer you become, the more you will see that your first thoughts, ideas, and language can be improved.
- ▶ Give yourself time to rewrite so that your readers see the best of your thoughts and writing, not the best you could come up with at the last moment.

# Find readers

- ▶ Ask people to read what you've written. Ask friends, professors, and capable colleagues for feedback.
- ▶ Don't expect your writing to be perfect, but strive for perfection.
- ▶ Give people drafts and let them know what sort of feedback you want (e.g., comments on organization, ideas, language, or the technical aspects of what you've written).

# References

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- ▶ Always keep bibliographic information in your notes. Include accurate and properly cited references in your writing.

# In summary

- ▶ A literature is a well-written analytical narrative that brings a reader up-to-date on what is known on a given topic, but also provide fresh insights that advance knowledge.
  - ▶ Resolve conflicts between studies.
  - ▶ Identify new ways to interpret research results.
  - ▶ Creating a path for future research.