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**From the SelectedWorks of Jess R. O'Toole**

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# How to Create a Literature Review.pdf



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Available at: <http://works.bepress.com/jess-otoole/3/>



# How to Create a Literature Review



# Outline for Today

- What is a Literature Review and Why Would I Write One?
- What to Include in a Literature Review (*Do I Have to Read Everything?*)
- Research Strategies (Where and How to Look for Information)
- Information Management
- The Actual Writing Part



# What is a Literature Review?





# What is a Literature Review?

- ▶ A **survey** of scholarly articles, books, dissertations, conference proceedings, and other resources that are relevant to a particular research topic

"A literature review is more than the search for information, and goes beyond being a descriptive annotated bibliography. All works included in the review must be read, evaluated and analysed (which you would do for an annotated bibliography), but relationships between the literature must also be identified and articulated, in relation to your field of research."

-CQ University Library, Australia



# Why Are Literature Reviews Important?

➤ 2 Main Reasons:

1. Justify your research by putting it in context and ensuring you're not replicating past work
2. Enable other researchers to gain more in-depth knowledge on a particular topic



# What to Include in a Literature Review

What makes up the literature on a given topic?

- ▶ Published research studies, journal articles, books, conference papers, patents, theses/dissertations, datasets, reports, etc.
- ▶ Unpublished studies and reports (look at Government resources, nonprofit organizations, etc.)

Relevant literature will be clearly linked to your goals and reasons for the review. Your level of expertise will determine the breadth and depth.



# What to Include in a Literature Review

**No**, you don't have to read everything.

**But** you have to read everything you include in your review.

- Don't depend on the abstracts, because they miss a lot of nuance.
- Know the material well enough to come up with your own analysis.





# Where to Look: Sources of Information

- Google/Google Scholar
- Library Databases/Free Online Databases
- Reaching out



# How to Look: Search Strategy

- ▶ Start with review articles
  - ▶ Read through them fully
  - ▶ Examine the citations
- ▶ Read through individual studies
- ▶ When you're reading, pay special attention to:  
background, conclusions, definitions of terms,  
suggestions for follow-up research, gaps,  
conflicts/disagreements




# How to Look: Keywords

- ▶ Can vary in difficulty depending on the research topic
- ▶ Use Wikipedia and other general sources to expand your vocabulary on a particular topic
- ▶ Keep reading/experimenting




# How to Look: Search Criteria

- ▶ What is the scope of your review?
- ▶ Remember, comprehensiveness depends on the goal of the review/your level of expertise on the topic.
- ▶ Your search criteria will be based on the relevancy to your review's scope and your research topic.



# How to Look: Evaluation of Sources


- Who are the authors and what are their biases?
- Who is the audience?
- What is the methodological quality of the study?
- Why was it written? What is the greater context of the work?



# How to Look: What is Distant Reading?

- ▶ What is distant reading?
  - ▶ Introduced & advocated by Italian literary scholar Franco Moretti
  - ▶ “understanding literature not by studying particular texts, but by aggregating and analyzing massive amounts of data.”

-New York Times, 6/24/11
- ▶ Take a wide view of the data (analytics)



# How to Look: The Reference List

- Citations
  - Citations demonstrate context for research
  - Can lead you to a wider scope of relevant research
- "Cited By"s
  - Good for finding more recent relevant research
  - Searchable in Google Scholar



# Let's Try a Sample Search...

- ▶ Kallmann syndrome
  - ▶ Google Scholar
  - ▶ PubMed
  - ▶ Web of Science





# Information Management

- ▶ Literature reviews deal with *lots* of information
  - ▶ You need to be able to keep that information organized so you can analyze and synthesize it in your review to make coherent points
- ▶ Make sure other researchers can find your references
- ▶ Make sure you are presenting your work honestly
- ▶ How do you do that? Citation management software
  - ▶ EndNote, Google Docs (Paperpile), Mendeley, Zotero, etc.



# The Actual Writing Part

- ▶ This is an iterative process
- ▶ Things to consider:
  - ▶ What are the key concepts and ideas?
  - ▶ What are the main questions or problems that have not yet been addressed?
  - ▶ What are the major issues and debates?
  - ▶ What is the greater context for these issues?
- ▶ Go back to the purpose and the type (what do literature reviews do, and what do you want yours to do?)



# The Actual Writing Part

- Introduction: Define/identify the research topic; point out overall trends, issues, and gaps; explain your criteria and scope, and your reason for creating the review
- Body: organize the research into groups; summarize individual studies; make it clear for the reader
- Conclusion: summarize; evaluate; bring back into context
- **Get feedback!**



# Further Resources



- ▶ Baumeister, R. F. (2013). Writing a literature review. In *The portable mentor* (pp. 119-132). Springer New York.
- ▶ Fink, A. (2014). *Conducting research literature reviews : From the internet to paper* (4TH ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- ▶ Pautasso, M. (2013). Ten simple rules for writing a literature review. *PLoS Computational Biology*, 9(7), e1003149.  
<http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003149>
- ▶ The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (2014). *Literature reviews*. Retrieved from  
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/>



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