



LITERATURE REVIEW: PHD COURSEWORK

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WHAT IS LITERATURE REVIEW?

A literature review is a “critical analysis of a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of prior research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles.”

A literature Review is a search and evaluation of the available literature in your given subject or chosen topic area. It documents the state of the art with respect to the subject or topic you are writing about.

A literature review surveys books, scholarly articles, and any other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, and by so doing, provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem being investigated.

Literature reviews are designed to provide an overview of sources you have explored while researching a particular topic and to demonstrate to your readers how your research fits within a larger field of study.

IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review may consist of simply a summary of key sources, but in the social sciences, a literature review usually has an organizational pattern and combines both summary and synthesis, often within specific conceptual categories. A summary is a recap of the important information of the source, but a synthesis is a re-organization, or a reshuffling, of that information in a way that informs how you are planning to investigate a research problem. The analytical features of a literature review might:

- Give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations
- Trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates
- Depending on the situation, evaluate the sources and advise the reader on the most pertinent or relevant research, or
- Usually in the conclusion of a literature review, identify where gaps exist in how a problem has been researched to date

OBJECTIVES OF LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review has four main objectives:

- It **surveys** the literature in your chosen area of study
- It **synthesises** the information in that literature into a summary
- It **critically analyses** the information gathered by identifying gaps in current knowledge; by showing limitations of theories and points of view; and by formulating areas for further research and reviewing areas of controversy
- It **presents** the literature in an organised way
- A literature review shows your readers that you have an in-depth grasp of your subject; and that you understand where your own research fits into and adds to an existing body of agreed knowledge.

OBJECTIVES OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Here's another way of describing those four main tasks. A literature review:

- demonstrates a familiarity with a body of knowledge and establishes the credibility of your work
- summarises prior research and says how your project is linked to it
- integrates and summarises what is known about a subject
- demonstrates that you have learnt from others and that your research is a starting point for new ideas

THE PURPOSE OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of a literature review is to:

- Place each work in the context of its contribution to understanding the research problem being studied
- Describe the relationship of each work to the others under consideration.
- Identify new ways to interpret prior research
- Reveal any gaps that exist in the literature
- Resolve conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous studies
- Identify areas of prior scholarship to prevent duplication of effort
- Point the way in fulfilling a need for additional research
- Locate your own research within the context of existing literature [very important]

A READING LIST

Fink, Arlene. *Conducting Research Literature Reviews: From the Internet to Paper*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005.

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SOURCES OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Sources can be

- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary

PRIMARY LITERATURE

Primary sources means original studies, based on direct observation, use of statistical records, interviews, or experimental methods, of actual practices or the actual impact of practices or policies. They are authored by researchers, contains original research data, and are usually published in a peer-reviewed journal. Primary literature may also include conference papers, pre-prints, or preliminary reports. Also called **empirical** research.

SECONDARY LITERATURE

Secondary literature consists of interpretations and evaluations that are derived from or refer to the primary source literature. Examples include review articles (such as meta-analysis and systematic reviews) and reference works. Professionals within each discipline take the primary literature and synthesize, generalize, and integrate new research.

TERTIARY LITERATURE

Tertiary literature consists of a distillation and collection of primary and secondary sources such as textbooks, encyclopedia articles, and guidebooks or handbooks. The purpose of tertiary literature is to provide an overview of key research findings and an introduction to principles and practices within the discipline.

ACCEPTABLE SOURCES

Following are a few acceptable sources for literature reviews, listed in order from what will be considered most acceptable to less acceptable sources for your literature review assignments:

- Peer reviewed journal articles.
- Edited academic books.
- Articles in professional journals.
- Statistical data from government websites.
- Website material from professional associations (use sparingly and carefully). The following sections will explain and provide examples of these various sources.

PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES (PAPERS)

A peer reviewed journal article is a paper that has been submitted to a scholarly journal, accepted, and published. Peer review journal papers go through a rigorous, blind review process of peer review. What this means is that two to three experts in the area of research featured in the paper have reviewed and accepted the paper for publication. The names of the author(s) who are seeking to publish the research have been removed (blind review), so as to minimize any bias towards the authors of the research (albeit, sometimes a savvy reviewer can discern who has done the research based upon previous publications, etc.). This blind review process can be long (often 12 to 18 months) and may involve many back and forth edits on the behalf of the researchers, as they work to address the edits and concerns of the peers who reviewed their paper. Often, reviewers will reject the paper for a variety of reasons, such as unclear or questionable methods, lack of contribution to the field, etc. Because peer reviewed journal articles have gone through a rigorous process of review, they are considered to be the premier source for research. Peer reviewed journal articles should serve as the foundation for your literature review.

EDITED ACADEMIC BOOKS

An edited academic book is a collection of scholarly scientific papers written by different authors. The works are original papers, not published elsewhere (“Edited volume,” 2018). The papers within the text also go through a process of review; however, the review is often not a blind review because the authors have been invited to contribute to the book. Consequently, edited academic books are fine to use for your literature review, but you also want to ensure that your literature review contains mostly peer reviewed journal papers.

ARTICLES IN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS

Articles from professional journals should be used with caution for your literature review. This is because articles in trade journals are not usually peer reviewed, even though they may appear to be. A good way to find out is to read the “About Us” section of the professional journal, which should state whether or not the papers are peer reviewed. You can also find out by Googling the name of the journal and adding “peer reviewed” to the search.

GOVERNMENT DATA

- Statistical data from governmental websites
- Governmental websites can be excellent sources for statistical data
- Archives, museums, gazettes, old documents etc.
- Examples like: <https://presidentofindia.gov.in/>

WEBSITE MATERIAL FROM PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Material from other websites can also serve as a source for statistics that you may need for your literature review. Since you want to justify the value of the research that interests you, you might make use of a professional association's website to learn how many members they have, for example. You might want to demonstrate, as part of the introduction to your literature review, why more research on the topic of ...

TYPES OF LITERATURE REVIEWS

- It is important to think of knowledge in a given field as consisting of three layers. First, there are the primary studies that researchers conduct and publish. Second are the reviews of those studies that summarize and offer new interpretations built from and often extending beyond the primary studies. Third, there are the perceptions, conclusions, opinion, and interpretations that are shared informally that become part of the lore of field.
- In composing a literature review, it is important to note that it is often this third layer of knowledge that is cited as "true" even though it often has only a loose relationship to the primary studies and secondary literature reviews. Given this, while literature reviews are designed to provide an overview and synthesis of pertinent sources you have explored, there are a number of approaches you could adopt depending upon the type of analysis underpinning your study.

ARGUMENTATIVE REVIEW

This form examines literature selectively in order to support or refute an argument, deeply imbedded assumption, or philosophical problem already established in the literature. The purpose is to develop a body of literature that establishes a contrarian viewpoint. Given the value-laden nature of some social science research [e.g., educational reform; immigration control], argumentative approaches to analyzing the literature can be a legitimate and important form of discourse. However, note that they can also introduce problems of bias when they are used to make summary claims of the sort found in systematic reviews

INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

Considered a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated. The body of literature includes all studies that address related or identical hypotheses or research problems. A well-done integrative review meets the same standards as primary research in regard to clarity, rigor, and replication. This is the most common form of review in the social sciences.

HISTORICAL REVIEW

Few things rest in isolation from historical precedent. Historical literature reviews focus on examining research throughout a period of time, often starting with the first time an issue, concept, theory, phenomena emerged in the literature, then tracing its evolution within the scholarship of a discipline. The purpose is to place research in a historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments and to identify the likely directions for future research.

METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW

A review does not always focus on **what** someone said [findings], but **how** they came about saying what they say [method of analysis]. Reviewing methods of analysis provides a framework of understanding at different levels [i.e. those of theory, substantive fields, research approaches, and data collection and analysis techniques], how researchers draw upon a wide variety of knowledge ranging from the conceptual level to practical documents for use in fieldwork in the areas of ontological and epistemological consideration, quantitative and qualitative integration, sampling, interviewing, data collection, and data analysis. This approach helps highlight ethical issues which you should be aware of and consider as you go through your own study.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

This form consists of an overview of existing evidence pertinent to a clearly formulated research question, which uses pre-specified and standardized methods to identify and critically appraise relevant research, and to collect, report, and analyze data from the studies that are included in the review. The goal is to deliberately document, critically evaluate, and summarize scientifically all of the research about a clearly defined research problem. Typically it focuses on a very specific empirical question, often posed in a cause-and-effect form, such as "To what extent does A contribute to B?" This type of literature review is primarily applied to examining prior research studies in clinical medicine and allied health fields, but it is increasingly being used in the social sciences.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The purpose of this form is to examine the corpus of theory that has accumulated in regard to an issue, concept, theory, phenomena. The theoretical literature review helps to establish what theories already exist, the relationships between them, to what degree the existing theories have been investigated, and to develop new hypotheses to be tested. Often this form is used to help establish a lack of appropriate theories or reveal that current theories are inadequate for explaining new or emerging research problems. The unit of analysis can focus on a theoretical concept or a whole theory or framework.

A READING LIST

Baumeister, Roy F. and Mark R. Leary. "Writing Narrative Literature Reviews." *Review of General Psychology* 1 (September 1997): 311-320

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