How to Write a Literature Review: An Overview for International Students

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Instruction Coordinator/
Liaison Librarian
James A. Gibson Library
Brock University
May 2010
Agenda

• What is a literature review?
• Challenges for international students
• Finding appropriate sources of information
• Searching effectively
• Managing references
• Putting it all together
• Using in-text citations
• Finding your voice
What is a literature review?

- A place to make connections between what you are investigating and what has already been investigated in your subject area

- A place to engage in a type of conversation with other researchers in your subject area

- A place to identify previous research on the topic

- A place to show there is a gap in the literature which your study can fill

- A place from which to begin your own investigation
Making connections

The ‘literature review’ is the part of the thesis where there is extensive reference to related research and theory in your field; it is where connections are made between the source texts that you draw on and where you position yourself and your research among these sources.

Engaging with other researchers

*It is your opportunity to engage in a written dialogue with researchers in your area while at the same time showing that you have engaged with, understood and responded to the relevant body of knowledge underpinning your research.*

Ridley, p. 2.
Identifying previous research

The literature review is where you identify the theories and previous research which have influenced your choice of research topic and the methodology you are choosing to adopt.

Ridley, p. 2.
Showing a gap in the literature

You can use the literature to support your identification of a problem to research and to illustrate that there is a gap in previous research which needs to be filled.

Ridley, p. 2.
Beginning your own investigation

*The literature review, therefore, serves as the driving force and jumping-off point for your own research investigation.*

Ridley, p. 2.
General Challenges

“Higher education courses seldom teach how to write a literature review, and good literature reviews are difficult for many beginning writers and researchers.”

General Problems (Maddox & Liu)

1. Some reviews consisted only of a largely unrelated annotated list of studies.

2. Many of the studies listed in the reviews were not relevant to the new study.

3. Many theories were mentioned or described in the reviews, but often without a clear, logical connection among the theories and without clearly pointing out the relevance of each description.

(Maddox & Liu, 60).
Answering general challenges

- Finding literature on your topic is only part of the process.
- What literature you do include must be relevant to your area of investigation.
- What pieces of the literature you do include must be logically connected to each other.
Challenges for international students

• Language challenges – knowledge and proficiency in English at a high level

• Educational background challenges – how and when English was learned as an L2

• Cultural challenges – where English was learned as an L2

• Support challenges – what assistance is available for helping L2 learners improve their writing skills
Chinese Graduate Students’ Experiences with Writing a Literature Review

Jun Qian and Eva Krugly-Smolska

Based on interview data, this study investigated four Chinese graduate students' experiences with writing a literature review at a medium-sized university in Canada. These students, from four subject areas, held varying perceptions of a literature review, but all saw the writing challenges that they encountered mainly as linguistic problems, especially regarding vocabulary and accuracy at the sentence level. The strategies that they used in the composing process were diverse, with each individual relying on them to varying degrees. Findings from this study suggest that Chinese graduate students need assistance in adjusting to the new academic environment and writing-genre expectations.

Reposant sur des données d’entrevues, cette étude est axée sur les expériences de quatre étudiants chinois des cycles supérieurs alors qu’ils apprenaient à rédiger une analyse documentaire dans une université de taille moyenne au Canada. Les participants, qui étudiaient dans quatre domaines différents, avaient diverses perceptions d’une analyse documentaire, mais tous interprêtaient les défis rédactionnels qu’ils confrontaient comme étant surtout linguistiques, notamment lexicaux et syntaxiques. Lors de la rédaction, les étudiants ont employé une diversité de stratégies, auxquelles ils ont eu recours dans différentes mesures. Les résultats indiquent que les étudiants chinois des cycles supérieurs ont besoin d’appui dans leur adaptation à leur nouveau milieu académique et aux attentes liées à la rédaction.
Challenges (Qian & Krugley-Smolska)

• Limited vocabulary

• Sentence-level difficulties – aim for simple and clear

• Paraphrasing – when and how
Strategies (Qian & Krugley-Smolska)

- Reading and modeling – read many reviews by other researchers
- Planning – develop a writing plan before you start writing
- Using the L1 and translation – do not write in Chinese first and then simply translate into English
- Communication with the supervisor – seek advice and feedback
How to Begin?
Finding Appropriate Sources of Information

• **Know what is appropriate:**
  – Scholarly, academic, peer-reviewed material
  – Material that presents empirical data/evidence to back up claims, not just opinions
  – Material that presents an introduction, purpose, background literature, method, procedures, findings, discussion, implications, conclusion

• **Know where to begin searching:**
  – Book catalogues
  – Library databases – Education Research Complete, Education @ Scholars Portal, ERIC, Educational Administration Abstracts, Education: Sage Full-Text Collection
Use books as a beginning point

• Why books first?

• They gather a lot of information on one topic in one place.

• They can provide a good overview or good background information on a topic.

• They often offer extensive bibliographies.
Book Searching

• Our library catalogue - http://catalogue.library.brocku.ca/

• Other Ontario universities

• National Library of Canada

• WorldCat – http://www.worldcat.org
Look for journal articles second

• Journal articles discuss one perspective.

• Each article makes a unique contribution.

• Articles can supplement information found first in books.

• Articles can offer more up-to-date information.
Note on journal articles

• Don’t rely on one journal article to give you all the content points you want to cover.

• It is your job to look at each journal article as one piece of information, and then to put all those pieces of information together.

• Putting the pieces together = making an argument
Choose your subject below to search databases by subject

- Comparative Literature and Arts
- Computer Science
- Dance
- Dramatic Arts
- Earth Sciences
- Economics
- Education
- English Language and Literature
- Entrepreneurship
- Film Studies
- Fine Arts
- French Language, Literature and Culture

As of May 20, 2008, students, faculty and staff will use their Brock email/portal username and password to:

- Access electronic resources from off campus
- Access My Library Account
- Renew items on loan
- Place holds on material checked out

A library PIN is no longer required!!

In addition all databases and e-books can now be accessed through the Library Catalogue.
Another beginning point

- http://scholar.google.ca/

Caveats:
- Google Scholar does not have nearly the number of publisher agreements as are available through our 400+ library databases.
- Use the Get It @Brock option to get back to full-text items from our databases (rather than going to a publisher’s page and paying them for information).
- Use Google Scholar in conjunction with RACER, our interlibrary loan system at Brock University.
Citation chasing

• Searching from a known item (an article your professor gave you, the bibliography of a book on the topic)

• Find the bibliographic information for the item

• **Cited Reference Searching** - See who else may have cited it (Ebsco databases like Education Research Complete, Web of Science, Google)
### Cited Reference Search

Find the articles that cite a person's work.

**Step 2 of 2:** Select cited references and click "Finish Search."

Select the references for which you wish to see the citing articles, then click the "Finish Search" button. Hint: Look for cited reference variants (sometimes different pages of the same article are cited or papers are cited incorrectly).

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</table>
Locating known journal articles

• Do a “journal title” search in the Library Catalogue.

• It will tell you which of the 400 databases indexes that journal (so you don’t have to guess which database).
TESOL quarterly / Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
Washington, D.C. : TESOL, 1967-

Click on the following to:
Access available issues through the publisher.

This title is available electronically via:

- **Ingenta**  Jan. 01, 2001-  More Information
- **JSTOR**  Jan. 01, 1967- Dec. 31, 2001  More Information

Identity
CALL #
Location
Latest Received:

Hardcopy
PER PE 1128 A2 T585
7TH FLOOR-PERIODICAL
2008 March v.42 no.1

Lib. Has
7th Floor - Periodical PER PE 1128 A2 T585 V.1,1967-
Searching Effectively

• Use quotation marks for bound phrase searching (“literature review” instead of literature review).

• Use descriptors (subject headings) rather than keywords – some databases include their own thesaurus of controlled subject vocabulary (ex. ERIC Thesaurus).
ERIC Thesaurus (English)

Clear Marked Terms | Add to Marked Terms

- Literature Reviews
  - Surveys of the materials published on a topic (Note: Prior to Mar80, "Research Reviews (Publications)" was also a valid Descriptor)
  - Use For
    - Literature Surveys
    - Reviews of the Literature

- Publications
  - Broader Terms
    - Anthologies
      - Collections of selected writings or other materials, usually in one form, from one period, or on one subject
    - Bibliographies
      - Descriptive lists of books or other printed materials, which are written by one author, during one period, on one subject, produced by one printer and/or publisher, or located in one place (Note: Corresponds to Pubtype code 131 -- do not use except as the subject of a document)
    - Bibliometrics
      - Descriptive lists of books or other printed materials, which are written by one author, during one period, on one subject, produced by one printer and/or publisher, or located in one place (Note: Corresponds to Pubtype code 131 -- do not use except as the subject of a document)
Title: IMPROVING THE WRITING OF LITERATURE REVIEWS THROUGH A LITERATURE INTEGRATION EXERCISE.

Authors: Zorn_Ted¹ tzom@mngt.waikato.ac.nz  
Campbell_Nittaya¹

Source: Business Communication Quarterly; Jun2006, Vol. 69 Issue 2, p172-183, 12p, 1 diagram

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: LITERATURE reviews  
BUSINESS communication -- Study & teaching  
TEACHING methods  
AUTHORSHIP  
COLLEGE students  
LANGUAGE arts (Higher)  
BUSINESS -- Research  
WORKPLACE literacy  
WRITTEN communication  
COMPOSITION (Language arts)

Abstract: The article refers to research on the genre of literature reviews and citation and discusses a method for teaching college students to write reviews, which might be required in their business communication courses. Guidelines and procedures for teaching and learning to write reviews are provided along with exercises and assignments to encourage students to master the skill.
# Search Tips

## Phrase Searches
Search for complete phrases by enclosing them in quotation marks. Words enclosed in double quotes will appear together in all results exactly as typed.

"world health organization"

## Wildcards
Words may be right-hand truncated using an asterisk. Use a single asterisk * to truncate from 1-5 characters. Use a double asterisk ** for open-ended truncation.

environment* polic*
inter**
wom?n

## Boolean Operators
Use AND or OR to specify multiple words in any field, any order. Use AND NOT to exclude words. Select the operator you wish to use from the selection list. Parentheses group words together when using Boolean operators.

stocks and bonds
(indian or pacific) and (ocean life and not mammals)

## Proximity Operators
The NEAR operator is used to retrieve records that contain the specified words or phrases within ten words of each other in the same indexed field.

international near conference
fractal within 3 geometry

## Field limits
Field limits may be specified by selecting a field limit from the selection list in the form above. These limits appear before the word or phrase to be searched. A field limit causes the system to search only the specified field for the specified word(s). The following field limits are supported:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Field limit</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Author:</td>
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<td>Subject:</td>
<td>Search only subject fields</td>
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<tr>
<td>Note:</td>
<td>Search only note fields</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learn how to read a citation


(from Education Research Complete)
Volume 26, Issue 1, 2008

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Database alerts

• An alert is an email message sent to you when new information becomes available.

• Some databases let you set up alerts for journal articles appearing under saved searches.

• Some databases let you set up alerts for new tables of contents for particular journals when they become available.

**Cited References (47)**

**Notes:**

![Get It!](image)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Add to Search</th>
<th>Search ID#</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
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(Searching: Education Research Complete)
Getting copies of articles

• Photocopies in the Library cost 10 cents a page.

• You need a photocopy card to release your print jobs in the Library.

• Cards cost $1 each.

• Print job remain in the queue for 24 hours.
RACER

• RACER is our interlibrary loan system for ordering material not held at Brock (books, journal articles).

• Books are picked up and dropped off at our Circulation Desk.

• Photocopies of journal articles may be kept.

http://www.library.brocku.ca/services/ill.htm
INTERLIBRARY LOAN/DOCUMENT DELIVERY

RACER
rapid access to collections by electronic requesting

Brock's interlibrary loan management system allows registered users to search for items in all Ontario university libraries using a single search interface, and to conveniently place borrowing requests for items not found in the Brock Library Catalogue.

This virtual union catalogue is named **RACER** (Rapid Access to Collections by Electronic Requesting).

★ Brock faculty, staff and students must pre-register to use the service.

- **End User Registration Form for First Time Users**
- **Search RACER and Submit Requests**
- **Instructions on Submitting Requests** (PDF format - requires Adobe Acrobat to view)
- **Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery Policies**
- **RACER Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**
Welcome to RACER, Brock’s Interlibrary Loan / Document Delivery system!

A one-time registration is required before you can submit an interlibrary loan request.

Who should fill out this form?

- All currently registered Brock faculty, students, and staff who want to use this service to request material not available at Brock.
- There may be restrictions on who may register for these services. If you are not sure if you are eligible, please check local interlibrary loan policies before filling out the form.

Brock University protects your privacy and your personal information. The personal information requested on this form is collected under the authority of The Brock University Act, 1964, and in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) for the administration of the University and its programs and services.

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<td>University ID:</td>
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<td>(May also be called: Student ID number)</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Name:</td>
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Search / Standard Search

Type the word or words you want to search. You can search for a complete phrase by typing it in quotation marks ("gone with the wind"). For more searching options, go to the Advanced Search page.

Current Profile: Ontario Univ. (Universities/Universités) [shared]

Keyword Search:

Searchable Collections

- Brock
- Lakehead
- McMaster
- Ontario College of Art and Design
- Queens
- Toronto
- TUG (Guelph, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier)
- Western
- York

Select All

Carleton
- Laurentian
- Nipissing
- Ottawa
- Ryerson
- Trent
- UOIT
- Windsor

Deselect All
Managing References

• Use RefWorks to build your own database of information.

• RefWorks holds citations and their links to the full text.

• You can create multiple folders in RefWorks.

• RefWorks allows you to create formatted bibliographies (APA, MLA, etc.).

• RefWorks allows you to create in-text references.
Welcome to ... 📜 RefWorks

Connect to RefWorks now!!

What is RefWorks?

RefWorks is a web-based bibliographic management program that allows you to:

🌟 Automatically generate a bibliography or reference list in over 200 styles including commonly used styles like APA and MLA.

🌟 Import references or citations from a wide variety of bibliographic databases or input your references manually.

🌟 Organize your references into folders for different projects or papers.

🌟 Download Write 'N Cite to make bibliographies quicker and easier.

How did the Library get RefWorks?

The James A. Gibson Library has entered into a licensing agreement with the Ontario Council of University Libraries to provide all Brock students, faculty and staff access to RefWorks for free!
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<td>Medicare; INSPIRIS to serve Humana’s frail elderly population in Phoenix</td>
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<td>Canadian First Nations War Hero Celebrated. (Cover story)</td>
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Putting It All Together

• You have found a lot of literature
  ▫ Now what?

• You need to organize what you have found:
  ▫ By theme?
  ▫ Chronologically?

• Tip: look at some examples
**Author**  Walliman, Nicholas S. R.

**Title**  Your dissertation in education / Nicholas Walliman and Scott Buckler.

**Imprint**  Los Angeles : SAGE, 2008.  [Rev. ed.]

**Location**  9TH FLOOR OF LIBRARY

**Call #**  LB 2369 W259 2008

**Status**  IN LIBRARY

**Descript.**  xv, 310 p. : ill. ; 25 cm.

**Series**  Sage study skills

**Note**  Previous ed. published as: Your undergraduate dissertation / by Nicholas S.R. Walliman. 2004.

Includes bibliographical references (p. [305]) and index.

**Bibliog.**  

**Subject**  Dissertations, Academic.

Academic writing.

**Alt Author**  Buckler, Scott.
**ProQuest Dissertations and Theses**

Provides subject, title, and author access to almost all American dissertations accepted at an accredited institution since 1861 and full-text of over 100,000 dissertations and theses. Masters theses have been selectively indexed since 1962. Citations are available from 1861 to the present. Abstracts are available for dissertations from 1980 to the present and for masters theses from 1988 to the present. From 1997, and sometimes earlier, the full-text of dissertations and theses with appropriate copyright permissions may be downloaded in PDF format. In addition, the database serves to disseminate citations and abstracts for thousands of Canadian dissertations and theses, including those of Brock University, and an increasing number of papers accepted in institutions abroad. Professional (e.g., M.D., LL.D.) and honorary degrees are not included. It includes Dissertations abstracts online (DAO) and the electronic version of: Comprehensive dissertation index supplement; Dissertation abstracts, sections A–C; Masters abstracts international (formerly issued in print).

**Database Name**

- **Description**

**Coverage**

- 1861-Present

**Full Text Availability**

- Yes

**Maximum Simultaneous Users**

- Unlimited

**Access**

- Brock Students/Faculty/Staff only
Welcome to the Theses Canada Portal!

Introduction

This is your central access point for Canadian theses and information about the Theses Canada program. From here you will be able to:

- Search AMICUS, Canada's national online catalogue, for bibliographic records of all theses in Library and Archives Canada's theses collection, which was established in 1965;
- Access and search the full text electronic versions of numerous Canadian theses and dissertations;
- Find out everything you need to know about Theses Canada, including how to find a thesis, how our program works, information on copyright and much more.
Brock Institutional Repository

- Now contains all M.Ed. Theses written by Brock graduate students
- Is a link on the library web page under the Collections tab at the top
Brock University Digital Repository

Welcome to the Digital Repository for Brock University. Here you will be able to find a collection of unique items created by Brock University.

Search the Repository

Communities in the Brock University Digital Repository

Select a community to browse its collections.

- Brock University Publications & Manuscripts
- Dissertations and Theses
- Special Collections and Archives
Masters Theses

Search within this community and its collections: [Search]

Collections in this community

- M.A. Applied Health Sciences
- M.A. Centre for Disability Studies
- M.A. Child and Youth Studies
- M.A. Classics
- M.A. Department of Community Health Sciences
- M.A. English
- M.A. Geography
- M.A. Philosophy
- M.A. Politics
- M.A. Popular Culture
- M.A. Program in Social Justice and Equity Studies
- M.A. Psychology
- M.A. Social Justice
- M.A. Sociology
- M.Ed. Education
- M.Sc. Applied Health Sciences
- M.Sc. Biology
- M.Sc. Chemistry
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**Title**
Role definition of principals in religious schools / Ian D. Gordon.

**Imprint**
St. Catharines, Ont. : Brock University, Faculty of Education, 2004.

**Author**
Gordon, Ian D.

**Descript.**
xii, 280 leaves : ill. ; 29 cm.

**Series**
Brock University. Faculty of Education. Master of Education project.

"Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education."

**Note**
Includes bibliographical references: (l. 176-228)
"Additional references" : (l. 235-244)

**Bibliog.**
Church schools -- Administration
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Using In-Text Citations

- In-text citations draw upon the literature to support your points.

- Any references you make to another author or any quotes that you use in your literature review must give citation information.

- You can physically create in-text citations by using Write-N-Cite, a software plug-in that is part of RefWorks.
**In-Text Citations: The Basics**

Reference citations in text are covered on pages 207-214 of the Publication Manual. What follows are some general guidelines for referring to the works of others in your essay.

**Note:** APA style requires authors to use the past tense or present perfect tense when using signal phrases to describe earlier research. E.g., Jones (1998) found or Jones (1998) has found...
In-Text Citation Capitalization, Quotes, and Italics/Underlining

Always capitalize proper nouns, including author names and initials: D. Jones.

If you refer to the title of a source within your paper, capitalize all words that are four letters long or greater within the title of a source: *Permanence and Change*. Exceptions apply to short words that are verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs: *Writing New Media*, *There Is Nothing Left to Lose*.

When capitalizing titles, capitalize both words in a hyphenated compound word: *Natural-Born Cyborgs*.

Capitalize the first word after a dash or colon: "Defining Film Rhetoric: The Case of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

Italicize or underline the titles of longer works such as books, edited collections, movies, television series, documentaries, or albums: *The Closing of the American Mind*; *The Wizard of Oz*; *Friends*.

Put quotation marks around the titles of shorter works such as journal articles, articles from edited collections, television series episodes, and song titles: "Multimedia Narration: Constructing Possible Worlds"; "The One Where Chandler Can't Cry."
Short Quotations

If you are directly quoting from a work, you will need to include the author, year of publication, and the page number for the reference (preceded by "p."). Introduce the quotation with a signal phrase that includes the author's last name followed by the date of publication in parentheses.

According to Jones (1998), "Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time" (p. 199). Jones (1998) found "students often had difficulty using APA style" (p. 199); what implications does this have for teachers? If the author is not named in a signal phrase, place the author's last name, the year of publication, and the page number in parentheses after the quotation. She stated, "Students often had difficulty using APA style," (Jones, 1998, p. 199), but she did not offer an explanation as to why.
Long Quotations

Place direct quotations longer than 40 words in a free-standing block of typewritten lines, and omit quotation marks. Start the quotation on a new line, indented five spaces from the left margin. Type the entire quotation on the new margin, and indent the first line of any subsequent paragraph within the quotation five spaces from the new margin. Maintain double-spacing throughout. The parenthetical citation should come after closing punctuation mark.

Jones's (1998) study found the following:

Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time citing sources. This difficulty could be attributed to the fact that many students failed to purchase a style manual or to ask their teacher for help. (p. 199)
If you are paraphrasing an idea from another work, you only have to make reference to the author and year of publication in your in-text reference, but APA guidelines encourage you to also provide the page number (although it is not required.)

According to Jones (1998), APA style is a difficult citation format for first-time learners.

APA style is a difficult citation format for first-time learners (Jones, 1998, p. 199).
Information literacy is a library process. In an influential early article, Carol Kuhlthau (1991) built a model of information literacy that she called the “Information Search Process”. She describes this process as “the user’s constructive activity of finding meaning from information in order to extend his or her state of knowledge on a particular problem or topic. It incorporates a series of encounters with information within a space of time rather than a single reference incident” (Kuhlthau, p.361). Craig Gibson (2007) picks up on this thread of information literacy as a process when he describes the current state of studies about the topic “centered on concepts and processes of accessing, evaluating, and using information” (Gibson, p. 23).
Finding Your Voice

• Go with simplicity and clarity? (“eschew obfuscation”)

Read “how to” manuals for ideas

Learn from others and yourself

- Look at OWL example (next screen).
- Take your own writing to a tutor/writing centre service.
- Ask your peers for comments; look at their writing.
- Study comments made on your own papers by your professors.
- Examine your professor’s writing.
- Practice, practice, practice, write, write, write!
Sample APA Papers: Literature Review

This resource was written by Karen S. Mooney.
Last full revision by .
Last edited by Dana Lynn Driscoll on May 15th 2007 at 3:03PM

Summary: This resource provides a sample literature review student paper. It is marked up with psychology teacher's comments and points out rhetorical considerations.

MEDIA

This resource is enhanced by an Acrobat PDF file.

- Download the free Acrobat Reader
- Download "Sample APA Literature Review"
Writing Approaches of Graduate Students

Ellen Lavelle* and Kathy Bushrow
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, USA

The writing approach framework provides a comprehensive perspective on college-level academic writing based on the relationship of writers’ beliefs and strategies to the quality of written outcomes. However, despite increased demands for more and better writing at the graduate level, little is known about graduate-level writing processes or about the beliefs of graduate students regarding writing. The goals of this project were the preliminary development of a factor analytic model of graduate writing processes, and of an inventory to measure writing strategies. The results support seven independent factors: elaborative, low self-efficacy, no revision, intuitive, scientist, task-oriented, and sculptor, with the intuitive factor predictive of an academic writing outcome.
Presenting your own voice

When writing your literature review, there are two main ways of presenting your own voice assertively. The first is by taking control of the text and leading your reader through the content... The second is by making your own position clear in relation to the source material that you incorporate and being explicit about how you will be drawing on particular aspects of previous work for your own research.

Ridley, p. 131
Ways of making your position clear

- Use the first person singular pronoun: “I,” “in my view”

- Use explicit transitions: “in direct contrast,” “in exactly the same way”

- Use strong adjectives: “insufficient,” “weak,” “supportive,” “most valuable”

- Ask yourself: Whose voice is strongest: mine or the authors I am citing?
Writing is a circular process

• Nothing will ever be perfect at any given moment in time.

• There is a constant need for improvement.

• Learn as you go along.

• Recognize what a good literature review may look like and strive to reach that goal.
Improving The Writing Of Literature Reviews Through A Literature Integration Exercise
Ted Zorn and Nittaya Campbell
Business Communication Quarterly 2006; 69; 172
DOI: 10.1177/1080569906287960

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://bcq.sagepub.com

Published by:
SAGE Publications
http://www.sagepublications.com
Such phrasing is appropriate if that is the case, but not if the source is simply someone’s opinion.

Third, a problem that may occur is that the writer may assert generalizations that are not sufficiently supported by the literature cited. As a result, the reader is not convinced of the writer’s conclusions.

Finally, poor organization or structure is a final writing problem that detracts from the effectiveness of literature reviews. Poor structure can make the argument or logic of the synthesis difficult for the reader to comprehend.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WELL-WRITTEN LITERATURE REVIEWS

To a large extent, the features that characterize effective writing in general also characterize effective literature reviews. Therefore, we will focus on those aspects of writing that are unique to literature reviews or are particularly problematic.

Literature reviews should include the following main components (UC–Santa Cruz, 2003):
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1. An introduction that provides an overview of the focus and objectives of the review, along with a thesis statement
2. A set of themes that categorize and make sense of the sources reviewed and develop the thesis (e.g., sources that support a particular position, those opposed, and those offering alternative views)
3. Explanation and evaluation of conclusions reached by key sources, and explanation of how they converge and diverge from the conclusions reached by other sources
4. Conclusions, reasonable speculations, and gaps that emerge after considering the sources as a whole

The introduction should articulate a clear and appropriate focus for the literature review. Like any good research project, a literature review should be guided by a specific objective or, better yet, a question to be answered. This will not only guide the search strategy for the literature review, but it should also guide the writing. Most parts of the written literature review—the introduction, the major headings, and the conclusion—can often be derived from this question. For example, imagine that the overall question driving an applied research project is, “How do employees perceive that communication about the
Summary

- A literature review is a very important part of your thesis or dissertation.
- It grounds your study in the work of others.
- It shows how your study is connected to others.
- It displays a gap in the literature which you are attempting to fill.
- It sets the tone for the rest of your work.
Further Questions to Consider

• Is it ever appropriate to use non-scholarly material?
• Is it appropriate to include bachelors and masters theses or just doctoral dissertations?
• Do you need to include quotations in your literature review?
• Should you include statistics, data, government data, laws and regulations?
• What should you do if you are researching in an emergent area that does not have much literature?
• Do you need to balance books, journal articles, and theses?
• How far back in the literature do you need to go?
• When is enough enough?
• What is acceptable to your advisor?
Final Tips

• Keep a research journal – record what you have done, where you have looked, what searches you used, what you found.

• Searching keywords in titles can give you an overview of the literature, but searching controlled vocabulary in the databases will take you to the most focused results.

• Create a list of relevant keywords and subject terms to use.

• Always track the literature up until the completion of your first draft, but do a final search immediately prior to completing/defending your thesis.

• Have your research statement (questions) and nature of research (methodology) prior to diving straight into the literature.
For More Information


Where to get help

- Your faculty advisor
- Other professors in the department
- Your liaison librarian
- Your classmates
- From people who have gone through it before
Some final thoughts

• Don’t let yourself become overwhelmed!

• It doesn’t all have to be done at once.

• Focus on one part at a time.

• Divide your work into manageable chunks.

• Remember that many other people have already gone through this (and survived to tell the tale).

• It can be done.

*Let's face it. Writing is hell.*

(William Styron)
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