

Writing a Literature Review

Lesson Four

A literature review . . .

- “[I]s an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers” (Dena Taylor, Director, Health Sciences Writing Centre, and Margaret Procter, Coordinator, Writing Support, University of Toronto).
- “[D]iscusses published information in a particular subject area, and sometimes information in a particular subject area within a certain time period” (University of North Carolina website).
- “[I]s a body of text that aims to review the critical points of current knowledge on a particular topic” (*Wikipedia* 3-19-07).

Comprehensive Definition

“A Literature Review Surveys scholarly articles, books, and other sources (e.g., dissertations, conference proceedings) relevant to a topic. . . . Its purpose is to demonstrate that the *writer* has insightfully and critically surveyed relevant literature on his or her topic in order to convince an intended *audience* that the *topic* is worth addressing” (105)

~from *Writing the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Entering the Discussion*

By Irene L. Clark

A literature review is NOT . . .

- An annotated bibliography
- A list of seemingly unrelated sources
- A literary survey containing author's bio, lists of works, summaries of sources
- Background information or explanations of concepts

Prewriting Stages

- Formulate the problem or primary research question —which topic or field is being examined and what are its component issues?
- Choose literature —find materials relevant to the subject being explored and determine which literature makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the topic .
- Analyze and interpret —note the findings and conclusions of pertinent literature, how each contributes to your field .

Organizing/Outlining

Methods for organizing the Lit Review

- **By subject** (if lit review covers more than one subject)
- **Chronologically**
- **By theme, idea, trend, theory, or major research studies**
- **By author**
- **By argumentative stance** ★

In all methods, relationships between elements (e.g., subject, theme, author, etc.) must be shown.

Writing the LR


- Immediately document and cite source you took the information from.
- Bookmark online sources.
- Bookmark “hard copy.” Use post-it notes to mark pages with relevant information.
- Keep track of page numbers or online locations of paraphrases and quotations.
- Note any connections between sources in separate notebook, electronic file or post-its on pertinent pages.
- If information comes from a class lecture, interview, or conference, note details immediately.

Beginning the Writing

- Introduce your LR by
 - Defining or explaining the primary problem addressed by the lit review, or if the LR is part of a larger work like a thesis or dissertation, explain the problem it addresses.OR
 - Explain main conflict(s) in the literatureOR
 - Explain the time frame you will reviewOR
 - Offer a rationale for your choice of source materialOR
 - Use all or some of the points above.



Body of the LR

- Use subheadings if dividing the LR topically, thematically, according to argumentative perspective, or according to time period.
- Be sure to show relationships between sources.
- Discuss **source's significant** contributions. 
- Do not develop ideas or use sources that are irrelevant to your thesis overall.
- **References to prior studies should be in past tense**; references to narrative or text other than studies should be in present tense.
 - Example: Smith's study of composition students **included** both male and female subjects. She **concludes** that gender plays no significant role in the writing process. She also **suggests** that further studies should look at age as a contributing factor, a variable her study **did** not consider.

Concluding the LR

- Summarize ideas, conflicts, themes, or historical (or chronological) periods.
- Contextualize your topic within the summary.
- Point out gap(s) in.....scholarship and, show how your research helps fill the gap(s).
- Ensure Transition to your next chapter.[t](#)

A sample paragraph with transitions

Researchers have conducted studies about siblings of special needs and autistic children because this group is vulnerable to adjustment difficulties (Cuskelly, 1999). **In fact**, specialists have compared the sibling-autism relationship to the MR relationship. They have **also** studied the importance of the family, and particularly the mother, in this relationship. **In addition**, Kaminsky and Dewey (2001) found that the autism-sibling relationship is characterized by less intimacy and pro-social behavior. This study **likewise** reports that these relationships were marked by fewer instances of quarreling. While this phenomenon may occur because of the unique situation of the autism-sibling relationship, less fighting is also a positive illustration of a relationship marked by more admiration. **Furthermore**, Rivers and Stoneman (2003) define this relationship as asymmetrical. These results are **also** similar to the MR-sibling relationship, as reported by Knott, et al. (1995). Rivers and Stoneman (2003) reveal, **too**, that parents worry about the autism-sibling relationship in their families. The importance of the family's influence on the autism-sibling relationship is very useful for this research study and **thus**, will be discussed in the conclusion of the literature review.

~Ellen Geib, CU Writing Center Tutor

Resources

- *Writing the Winning Thesis or Dissertation: A Step by Step Guide*, 2nd Ed by Allen Glatthorn and Randy L. Joyner
- *Successful Dissertations and Theses: A Guide to Graduate Student Research from Proposal to Completion*, 2nd Ed by David Madsen
- *Writing the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Entering the Conversation* by Irene L. Clark

Any Questions???



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THANKS