

## **Conducting a Literature Review**

### **Level 2: Mid-level (200-level courses)**

**Topic:** How to conduct a literature review of refereed research journal articles and identify the research knowledge gaps for a potential research project.

**Learning Outcomes:** By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- (1) construct a written review of research journal articles related to one's research interests.

**Time (approximate):**

Instructor Presentation	15 minutes
Student Exercise/Activity	60-90 minutes

**Reading Suggestions:**

Caron, P. G. "How to write a research paper and a literature review paper."  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_dKLcXBFjw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_dKLcXBFjw)

Google search shows handouts from several universities.

**Instructor's Notes and Student Exercise/Activity:**

Writing a literature review like telling a story or reporting what we know. But there are several ways to tell a good story. The literature provides a brief description of each study you came across, the research method it used, what it concluded, and how it compared with other similar studies. It will cite the authors – remember, (Smith & Jones 2015).

The simplest way to write a literature review is the “necklace method.” This approach simply strings together the various studies, like pearls are strung together on a necklace. The results of each study are described in a brief paragraph like the pearls on the necklace. Although the paragraphs are strung together, there is no overriding theme necessarily connecting the paragraphs.

Second, the “chronological method” is similar to the necklace method except that the studies are placed in order of the dates they were published. This method can demonstrate how what we know has evolved over time. It explores: How has the story unfolded?

A third approach, the “location method,” builds on the necklace method, and perhaps elements of the chronological method, but groups the studies together based on the place where the study was conducted. Perhaps one set of studies was conducted on Indian reservations in the western part of the US, a second set was conducted with Indian people in the central US, and a third set was conducted in the eastern US. This approach addresses: To what degree can the results from one location be applied to another location? And to what degree can the results be generalized to those who live anywhere?

Fourth, the “subjects’ characteristics method” is similar to the location method, but instead of grouping studies according to the places the studies were conducted, the studies are based on the demographics of the people in the study. For instance, one group of studies may have interviewed men whereas a second group of studies interviewed women. One group of studies may have interviewed youths whereas a second group interviewed the elderly. Or one group of studies was based on surveys among Whites, whereas other groups of studies were based on Indians, Blacks, or Hispanics. This approach asks: To what degree can the results from one demographic of people be applied to another demographic? And to what degree can the results be generalized to those who all people regardless of sex, age, race, ethnicity, religion, income level, education, or other demographic characteristic?

Fifth, the “methodology method” groups the studies according to the type of research methodology used. For example, one group of studies may have used questionnaire surveys as a methodology, another group used personal interviews or focus groups, whereas a third group used participant observations. Can the results from one methodology be compared with the results of a different methodology?

Another approach to literature reviews is the “results method.” Studies that had one set of conclusions are grouped together. They are compared with a group of studies that offered a different set of conclusions. This approach examines questions like: Are there reasons for the

different conclusions of these studies? Perhaps the differences were based on the time frame when the study was conducted, the locations where the studies took place, the people who were included as study participants, or the research methodologies themselves.

Which is the “right” approach (trick question!) to conducting a literature review? As you might imagine, each method has advantages and disadvantages. The right method to conducting a literature depends on the research question being asked. Does the research question pertain to the differences between men and women regarding a behavior or attitude? Is the research question about urban people compared with rural people? The best approach to deciding how to write the literature review is the one that helps you best “tell the story” of what is known about your subject

The parts of a literature review are as follows: *The introduction*. A two-or-three sentence paragraph restates the research question, which is the topic to be addressed in the literature review. *The literature review body*. Each paragraph describes one of the studies that helps to tell the story of what we know about the topic. Each should help to answer part of the research question. The paragraph should briefly state how the study was conducted, the characteristics of the research subjects, and summarize the findings. Usually the paragraph includes only three or four sentences plus a transition sentence between each paragraph. Be sure to cite the authors of the study – remember, (Smith & Jones 2015). *The conclusion*. Just like any good story has an ending, the literature review has a conclusion. This paragraph should be about two or three sentences long.

#### Exercise #2:

Let’s write a brief literature review using a couple refereed research journal articles. Let’s say that the research questions are as follows: What factors affect school success on Indian reservations? To what degree do age, gender, parents’ income, and culture impact Indian children’s academic success?

Typically, you would conduct a Google Scholar search to find journal articles related to the topic. For these exercise, we’ve found three articles for you to use:

**Assessment/Scoring Rubric:**

	<b>Needs Improvement 1</b>	<b>Satisfactory 2</b>	<b>Excellent 3</b>
Objective 1. Write a literature review	<input type="checkbox"/> Article reviews were incomplete. <input type="checkbox"/> Review failed to include introduction and/or conclusion. <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, grammar, spelling needs work.	<input type="checkbox"/> Article reviews were partially complete. <input type="checkbox"/> Review included introduction and conclusion. <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, grammar, spelling were good.	<input type="checkbox"/> Article reviews were complete. <input type="checkbox"/> Review included introduction and conclusion. <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, grammar, spelling were very good.

**Model example of Exercise #2 at the “excellent” level:**

**(Kalley)**

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