DEVELOPING A LITERATURE REVIEW: TIPS & STRATEGIES

SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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SESSION OVERVIEW

- What this session will NOT cover!
- The Role of the Literature Review
- Strategies for Organization and Writing
LIBRARY SERVICES

- Research Services (2nd Floor)
  - Research Consultations**
  - Specialized Research/Reference Resources
  - Ready Reference/Research Assistance
    - Ask-a-Librarian: http://lib.msstate.edu/help
LIBRARY SERVICES

- Access Services (2nd Floor)
  - InterLibrary Loan (Illiad)
  - Circulation

- Office of Thesis and Dissertation Format Review (1st Floor)
  - Dissertation and Theses Submission Workshops
OTHER RESOURCES

- Writing Center
  - http://www.writingcenter.msstate.edu
  - Available at multiple locations (including the library!)
  - Appointments also available online.
WHY DO WE DO A LITERATURE REVIEW?
“...the literature can arouse your curiosity, extend your thinking and help you make sense of the issue you are grappling with as the particular focus of your enquiry...the literature review is a challenging but potentially very rewarding part of the research process....” (Ridley, pg 203)
“Doctoral students must be scholars before they are researchers. First and foremost, a dissertation should demonstrate a thorough and sophisticated grasp of one’s field of study....” (Boote and Beile, pg. 11)
PURPOSE OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

- Map the fields relevant to the research question.
- Establish which studies, ideas, or methods are relevant to the research question.
- Defend the need for the research.
- Identify the contribution your research will make to the broader field. (Linkages!!)
WHY IS THE LITERATURE REVIEW IMPORTANT?

- Demonstrates that you are familiar with the literature relevant to your research.
  - What research has been done; what’s known and unknown about your topic.
  - What methods and methodologies have been used.
  - Dominant paradigms and theories.
- Articulates the relationship of your research to the broader field of study.
  - Establishes the value of your research.
MANAGING THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Topic

Writing/Synthesis

Locating Relevant Literature
Start with the most recent articles and work backwards.

Identify relevant theoretical articles.

Identify useful “review” articles.

Make sure you have identified any “landmark” or classic works related to your topic.
INTERLIBRARY LOAN: YOUR TICKET TO A WORLD OF RESEARCH

- Allows access to books, journal articles, and other materials not held locally.
- Allow time for requests to be processed!
  - Articles usually come electronically.
  - Other materials come via courier or express mail.
Evaluation matrices or rubrics can help you evaluate your sources.

A literature review matrix is a chart that can help you categorize research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Coverage</strong></td>
<td>A. Justified criteria for inclusion and exclusion from review</td>
<td>Did not discuss the criteria inclusion or exclusion</td>
<td>Discussed the literature included and excluded</td>
<td>Justified inclusion and exclusion of literature</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Distinguished what has been done in the field from what needs to be done</td>
<td>Did not distinguish what has band has not been done</td>
<td>Discussed what has and has not been done</td>
<td>Critically examined the state of the field</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Placed the topic of problem in the broader scholarly literature</td>
<td>Topic not place in broader scholarly literature</td>
<td>Some discussion of broader scholarly literature</td>
<td>Topic clearly situated in broader scholarly literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Placed the research in the historical context of the field</td>
<td>History of topic not discussed</td>
<td>Some mention of history of topic</td>
<td>Critically examined history of topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Acquired and enhanced the subject vocabulary</td>
<td>Key vocabulary not discussed</td>
<td>Key vocabulary defined</td>
<td>Discussed and resolved ambiguities in definitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F. Articulated important variables and phenomena relevant to the topic</td>
<td>Key variables and phenomena not discussed</td>
<td>Reviewed relationships among key variables and phenomena</td>
<td>Noted ambiguities in literature and proposed new relationships</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. Synthesized and gained a new perspective on the literature</td>
<td>Accepted literature at face value</td>
<td>Some critic of literature</td>
<td>Offered new perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Methodology</strong></td>
<td>H. Identified the main methodologies and research techniques</td>
<td>Research methods not discussed</td>
<td>Some discussion of research methods used to produce claims</td>
<td>Critiqued research methods</td>
<td>Introduced new methods to address problems with predominant methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Related ideas and theories in the field to research methodologies</td>
<td>Research methods not discusses</td>
<td>Some discussion of research methods to warrant claims</td>
<td>Critiqued appropriateness of research methods to warrant claims</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Significance</strong></td>
<td>J. Rationalized the practical significance of the research problem</td>
<td>Practical significance of research not discussed</td>
<td>Practical significance discussed</td>
<td>Critiqued practical significance of research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K. Rationalized the scholarly significance of the research problem</td>
<td>Scholarly significance of research not discussed</td>
<td>Scholarly significance discusses</td>
<td>Critiqued scholarly significance of research</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5. Rhetoric</strong></td>
<td>L. Was written with a coherent, clear structure that supported the review</td>
<td>Poorly conceptualized, haphazard</td>
<td>Some coherent structure</td>
<td>Well developed, coherent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LITERATURE REVIEW MATRIX

- Citation Information
- Purpose
- Variables
- Subjects/Data
- Findings/Results

- Critical Definitions
- Key Terms
- Limitations
- Personal Reflections
## Sample Literature Review Matrix

*(Design with Your OWN Columns!)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Title, Journal</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Research Question/Hypotheses</th>
<th>Methodology (Variables, Tests)</th>
<th>Analyses and Results</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source 1</td>
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<td>Source 2</td>
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<td>Source 3</td>
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<td>Source 4</td>
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<td>Source 5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
GOOD RESEARCH PRACTICES

- Maintain your search record.
  - Where you searched, terms used.
- Always go to the primary source, if possible. Never cite something you have not read.
- Make sure you have bibliographic information for all sources.
- Keep backup files/information for your literature review.
COMMON MISTAKES

- Does not clearly relate the findings of the literature review to the researcher’s own study;
- Does not take sufficient time to define the best descriptors and identify the best sources to use in review literature related to one’s topic;
- Relies on secondary sources rather than on primary sources in reviewing the literature;
COMMON MISTAKES

- Uncritically accepts another researcher’s findings and interpretations as valid, rather than examining critically all aspects of the research design and analysis;
- Does not report the search procedures that were used in the literature review;
- Reports isolated statistical results rather than synthesizing them by chi-square or meta analytic methods; and
- Does not consider contrary findings and alternative interpretations in synthesizing quantitative literature. (161-162)
  - Quoted from Gall, Borg, and Gall as reported in Randolph, 2009.
HELP WITH THE SEARCH PROCESS

- Literature Reviews are not “one and done”!
- Use the functionality of the databases to continue to discover relevant resources.
HELP WITH CITATION MANAGEMENT

- Citation Management Software
  - http://guides.library.msstate.edu/citation_management
- Workshops and individual consultations available:
  - EndNote (purchase)
  - Mendeley (MSU has an institutional account)
  - Zotero


QUESTIONS?

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Your feedback on this session is greatly appreciated!