The Literature Review
500 Research Methods
Fall 2002
Mike Kroelinger
The literature review is analogous to the “fox hunt”.

“Somewhere out there is the fox, but here you sit with horses, dogs and formal ceremonies. The hunt begins with a random search of the woods until one dog picks up the trail. So goes the literature search, except unlike the hunter most of us tire of the hunt, or worse yet ...."
… never get the horse out of the barn. The primary reason for not participating in the chase is usually *not understanding where to begin* and how the effort can enhance the quality of our work.”

Strategy for Literature Review

Process

- Concept of “serendipity”:
  Derives from a Persian fairy tale about three princes who made fortunate discoveries. Horace Walpole’s “The Three Princes of Serendip” is really about three princes that had a knack for being curious and open-minded when putting two and two together and sometimes coming up with more than four…..
A successful literature review search should provide plenty of two-plus-twos adding up to four.

Doesn’t depend on just the facts.

Depends on how you put the facts together.

Strategy for Literature Review

- “Funnel” analogy is appropriate.
- Review general to specific.
- Narrow the search
- Define, define, define!
Strategy for Literature Review

Process

- Establish a *standard framework* for conducting a literature review.
- Establish a method of *abstracting* the information from each reading in your review.
- Do not construct your literature review as a series of abstracts -- better to lay a *systematic framework or foundation* for your study!
A literature review provides the context in which a research study relates to the knowledge in the subject field.

It’s development and compilation also gives the researcher the needed knowledge base to effectively develop the research problem and implement the research project.
**Strategy for Literature Review Process**

- Creswell criteria, page 31 (1st ed. page 23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of the Literature</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Examples of Suitable Method Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The literature is used to “frame” the problem in the introduction to the study.</td>
<td>Some literature must be available.</td>
<td>Typically used in all qualitative studies, regardless of type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The literature is presented in a separate section as a “review of the literature.”</td>
<td>This approach is often acceptable to an audience most familiar with the traditional, positivist approach to literature reviews.</td>
<td>This approach is used with those studies employing a strong theory and literature background at the beginning of a study, such as ethnographies, critical theory studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The literature is presented in the study at the end; it becomes a basis for comparing and contrasting findings of the qualitative study.</td>
<td>This approach is most suitable for the “inductive” process of qualitative research; the literature does not guide and direct the study, but rather becomes an aide once patterns or categories have been identified.</td>
<td>This approach is used in all types of qualitative designs, but it is most popular with grounded theory, wherein one contrasts and compares his or her theory with other theories found in the literature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategy for Literature Review

Process

- Include essential information
- Key points from Creswell (p.34)
- Applies to each item in your review (research studies)

Mention the problem being addressed.
State the central purpose or focus of the study.
Briefly state information about the sample, population, or subjects.
Review key results that relate to the study.

Depending on whether or not the review is a methodological review (Cooper, 1984), point out technical and methodological flaws in the study.
Strategy for Literature Review

Process

- Essential information for items that are not research studies
- Essays, projects, typologies

Mention the problem being addressed by the article or book.
Identify the central theme of the study.
Identify the major conclusions related to this theme.
If the review type is methodological, mention flaws in reasoning, logic, force of argument, and so forth.
Strategy for Literature Review

Process

- A thorough review will allow you to place your questions or objectives *in perspective* to the work of others.
- You must establish a link between your study and the *current knowledge* in the field of study or you may need to do qualitative work collecting “data” before literature review.
Strategy for Literature Review Process

- If you don't find a *link* you may not have a very significant study!
- Use the literature review to help you *limit* your questions or objectives.
- The literature review should help you *operationalize* your definitions (*translate* your concepts).
Strategy for Literature Review Process

- If there are contradictory results in other studies, the review should help you clarify why they conflict.
- You derive your methodology from the review!
- Should also enable you to better determine the significance of your results.
Strategy for Literature Review

Process

- The literature review occurs *in conjunction* with, not before or after, the formulation of the problem and the design of the research!
- *Varies* depending on quantitative or qualitative approach.
It is essential that you find out where to find the related work in your area -- indices, clearinghouses, organizations, governmental agencies, etc.

The review should not include studies that are only peripherally related to your study!
Steps to the Literature Review

- Use Creswell’s example as a place to start
- He advocates a review that contains sections on literature about:
  - Major independent variables
  - Major dependent variables
  - Studies that relate to the independent and dependent variables
- Five sections (see page 45)
Steps to the Literature Review

- Five sections:
  - Introduce the section (about organization)
  - Review topic 1 (independent variables)
  - Review topic 2 (dependent variables)
  - Review topic 3 (relates independent to dependent)
  - Summary of the review (highlight most important studies)

- Logical departure for the method chapter
- Design a “map” of the literature review (visual picture)
Steps to the Literature Review

Figure 2.1. Locke's Research Map of the Literature

Figure 2.2. Creswell's Research Map on Mixed Method Studies
Steps to the Literature Review

- Identify the research topic as to:
  - Subject matter:
  - Focus (theory building, application, etc.):
  - Population of concern (variables that describe the population or problem):
  - Other topic parameters:
Steps to the Literature Review

- Retrieval terms or descriptors (those terms and phrases to look up in various indexes or use for computer searches).
  - List: Primary terms or key words:
  - Secondary terms or key words:
Steps to the Literature Review

- Major relevant indexes to search. List them!
- Time span for search. Give years (1980 and beyond, etc.):
- Plan for compiling literature content (how you will take notes, file copied material, use abstracting form, etc.). Outline your plan:
Steps to the Literature Review

- Design a map (Creswell, p. 39)
- Appropriateness of computer search.
  - Identify usable systems by contacting the appropriate librarian.
  - Take your research statement and your key words with you!
  - Find out if costs are involved.
Steps to the Literature Review

- Identify major works and authors on your research topic.
  - Create a listing of the citations.
- Identify major sources of "hard data" on the subject.
  - List citations.
- Develop topic outline for your review of literature.
Steps to the Literature Review

- Define the background that you need regarding your proposed research methodology
  - List questions to answer or topics to explore.
  - Make sure that you identify methodology used in each citation that you abstract!
- Develop time plan for developing your review of literature.
- Estimate budget required (copying, interlibrary loan, supplies, computer searches, etc.).
Instructions for Abstracts

- **Author(s)**
  - Person or persons whose work is being abstracted

- **Title**
  - Complete title of article, chapter or publication

- **Publication date**
  - Date and volume, number, etc.

- **Source**
  - Title of book or publication as well as publisher's name, address, page numbers.
Instructions for Abstracts

- Retrieval terms
  - One to two word terms or phrases that indicate content of material.
  - Avoid meaningless jargon.
  - These terms are the most important terms that would appear in an index.
  - The purpose of this inclusion is to help others compile bibliographies of readings on a given topic, so be accurate and list as many terms as you need to in describing the content, subject, and methodology.
Instructions for Abstracts

- **Objectives or hypotheses**
  - Why was the article or chapter written?
    - For research: what the author wanted to prove or disprove.
    - For other readings: a concise main theme.

- **Population/geographic area**
  - For research: population being studied.
  - For other readings: intended audience.
  - Make sure you include date of data collection and sample size.
Instructions for Abstracts

- Annotation (ask yourself the following questions):
  - What would someone else want an/or need to know (do not repeat the objectives):
  - About this article in deciding whether or not to read the article. Is the content applied, theoretical or combination?
  - Are there any unfound or inappropriate assumptions in the publication?
Instructions for Abstracts

- Annotation (continued)
  - Has the author met the objectives s/he stated? Why or why not?
  - Is a relevant bibliography included?
  - Is the research sound?
  - As you can see, the intent in annotation is to be analytical rather than just summarizing.
Instructions for Abstracts

- **Document type**
  - Examples might include magazines, professional journals, newspapers, research reports, the web, etc.

- **Abstractor**
  - Your name.
Final Comments

- Think ahead about computerization of this info you may be able to save time later, especially if you use the correct style manual for citations, etc.
- Here’s where EndNote comes into play!
- Develop a standard format for abstracting and begin outline of your review process (assignment # 4)