Research for Literature Review in Social Sciences

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What is a literature review?
Definition

“A literature review is an assessment of a body of research that addresses a research question.”

Basically, it’s a write-up at the beginning of your paper that presents your analysis of other research and scholarship on your topic.

Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, Gutman Library, 2012
More specifically...

A Literature Review:

- Contextualizes your topic
- Lays the groundwork for your research
- Brings your reader up-to-date on previous research by other scholars
- Establishes you as knowledgeable in your discipline
- Points to agreements and disagreements among scholars
- Captures the scholarly conversation: Not just a summary or annotated bibliography

Babbie, 2010, p. 523
Funnel Approach

Start broad, explore multiple disciplines

Get more and more specific

Until you arrive at your exact topic
Funnel Approach: An Example

Research Topic: Ecotourism in Uganda

Interventions that Empower Local Communities to Benefit Economically from Western Ecotourism
Dinner Party

Another analogy: Think of a lit review like a dinner party. Who should have a seat at the table? Who will make for best conversation?

- Journalist reporting on effects of Western tourism in Uganda
- NGO practitioner monitoring environmental changes in Uganda
- Economist studying Eastern/Central Africa emerging economies
- Ugandan government official working on infrastructure improvements

What to Do If...

- It’s confusing
  - Get a second set of eyes on that stat! You might be too close to the material.

- It’s dry or just plain boring
  - You are telling a story. Use current examples, synthesize, make sure your ideas are present.
  - Get a second set of eyes on that!

- It reads like a list
  - Synthesize! This isn’t a summary, it’s positioning your work among other work.
  - Get a second set of eyes on that!

- It’s too long/too short
  - Summarize, group together things, set limits for yourself.
  - Get a second set of eyes on that!

- It wanders off, goes on tangents
  - Subheadings may help guide, make sure your transitions properly link ideas
  - Get a second set of eyes on that!
Keep in Mind...

- Document/summarize everything you read.
- Your original question is your guide.
- Mine the bibliographies of references you have already found.
- Read through lit reviews of other dissertations/theses/articles
  - Brandeis Institutional Repository: http://bir.brandeis.edu/handle/10192/22921
  - Proquest: UNet login required
    http://search.proquest.com.resources.library.brandeis.edu/pqdtft/index?accountid=9703
- Tools to organize yourself: Excel, Zotero, Evernote. Find a system that works!

STOP When:

- You’ve searched across databases/sources and keep getting the same results.
- You’ve checked with someone else - librarian, advisor, fellow researcher and they have no new suggestions of where to look.
Didn’t Find That One Magical Article?

Maybe You’re Writing It!
References


Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, and Inc Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment (2014). *Bob's Burgers*. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.