Getting to a Literature Review

Academic Resource Center (ARC)
Know Your Destination

• What is the question you are trying to answer?
• The literature review should guide the reader to the question you are researching
Literature Review- Purpose

• Identifies conceptual framework for your research

• Provides context for the research question
  • What is known/researched?
  • What are the gaps in research?
  • Provides directions for the research you will do

• Provides the evidence to back up your arguments
Lit Review Structure: Broad to Narrow

Effects of individual vs. group intervention for treatment of school avoidance in high school students.

- Demographics of school avoidance
  - Why kids avoid school?
- Group vs. individual treatment of adolescents
- Research on interventions for school avoidance
  - Types of programs
  - Efficacy data
- No existing comparisons
Using the broad to narrow funnel

The level of detail you report about a study depends on the relevance to your question

• At broad description- less detail needed

• As focus narrows to your research question provide more detail on the research cited
Writing the lit review

You are reviewing research as it relates to your question; building an argument for your study.

Ask yourself:

• How do the studies in your lit. review relate to your question? How are the other studies related to each other?

• How much detail? Enough but not too much- pluck the essential findings
Organizing a literature review

• Don’t create a parade of studies—presented chronologically—a lit review is NOT a group of linked abstracts, one per paragraph

• Do create a narrative that weaves the studies and organizes them by theme or concept
Selecting articles to include:

• Read the abstract first
• Consider research from different vantage points (don’t shun those that contradict your point of view)
• Select the most comprehensive, credible studies
  • Metanalyses
  • Lit. Reviews
  • say that other studies confirm the findings of the one you selected
Reading an Article

- Don’t report the author’s literature review
- Identify the purpose/question of their research
- Report:
  - What did they do?
  - Who did they do it with?
  - What did they find? (Read the discussion first; then results section)
  - Report the findings that are most relevant to your question-
    - Don’t cherry pick just the points that agree
    - Don’t report what’s not relevant
- Discuss limitations primarily as they relate to your research question
Weaving studies into a narrative

• Approach A: Smith (2013) studied the implications of group conflict. He issued an online questionnaire to 1,520 corporate managers (60% male ages 30 to 45, 20% female ages 35 to 60) and asked about how their organizations handled communication between groups of employees. He found that....

• Approach B: In a study of 1,520 corporate managers, Smith (2013) found that generational and cultural differences must be considered when encouraging team communication
Researching Your Topic:

- Use Research Management Strategy
  - Citation manager (Mendeley, Zotero)
- Research Search Strategy
  - Develop search terms (don’t forget synonyms)
  - Use appropriate databases (Psychinfo, Medline for biomedical topics)
  - Don’t forget Google Scholar
    - Link it to WJC Library databases
    - See who else has cited an article
General Writing Tips

• Outline your literature review
• Focus on one section at a time
• Every time you say “research has shown” or “the literature indicates” you have to cite a source for this statement
• Don’t say “a study by XXX” just say “XXX (xxx) found…"
• Use active voice- not “it was found by Smith” but rather “Smith found…”
Researching Your Topic

• In PsycInfo look at Methodology to select “literature review”
• Look at Annual Review of Clinical Psychology (login from A-Z journal list)
Other sources for guidance

• ARC research and writing resources web site:

http://guides.williamjames.edu/ARC-Research_And_Writing_Resources
More Questions?

Call or email:

- **Research questions/consultation**
  - Joan Axelrod, ARC Coordinator
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  - Matt Kramer, ARC Research and Writing Specialist
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- We are also available via Zoom online conference