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Getting Started Right: Writing the Literature Review

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Getting Started
Right: Writing the
Literature Review

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the UNC

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the "write" place for everyone

Workshop Agenda

1. What is and isn't a Literature Review
(the purpose)
2. How to critically read for your
Literature Review
3. How to organize your sources
4. Writing the Literature Review

Asking Questions

- ❑ Maggie will be watching the chat, so you may submit questions at any time during the presentation.
- ❑ I will stop after each section and check in to see if we have questions in the moment.
- ❑ There will be time at the end to ask additional questions as well.

1

What is a
Literature
Review?

What a Literature Review Isn't

- ❑ It's not a “stitched together” Annotated Bibliography.
- ❑ It's not a traditional research paper with a thesis.
- ❑ It's not necessarily exhaustive in that it includes everything ever written on your topic.

What is a Literature Review?

1. A demonstration that you have made yourself fully aware of your topic and the discussion surrounding your topic.
2. Evidence that you have the capabilities to be a researcher by the quality of your literature review.
3. Confirmation of your abilities as a communicator to show where and how your research fits into the ongoing conversation.

LRs Create a Research Space

- ❑ Linguist John Swales conducted a genre analysis of hundreds of literature reviews from dozens of disciplines to determine how academics write this section of their research.
- ❑ His piece, “Creating a Research Space,” (CaRS for short) reveals the purpose of a Literature Review: to create a space for *your* research within the ongoing conversation of the literature. We’ll come back to this in a bit.

Literature Review First

- ❑ Many research guides and handbooks stress the importance of doing your literature review before jumping into your actual research.
 - ❑ You can't contribute to a field or conversation without knowing what's been done or what's being said. Lit Reviews help you map the field *before* you start your study.
 - ❑ You'll see the "gap" where your study will fit.
 - ❑ Reading other studies will likely help you shape your own study, for example, methodologically.

What's a “gap”?




Questions about
Literature Reviews
in general?

2

Reading for Your Lit Review

Searching, Reading, &
Taking Notes



How many of us
already have a
research question?

Use the Zoom hand-raising feature

Example Research Question: What are students' perspectives on learning about and proposing primary research in their first-year research writing course?

1. First-year writing and research
2. Student perspectives on writing and research
3. Primary research (probably my gap)

I would have to research all THREE of these areas to really know the conversation surrounding my research question.

Have a Plan

- ❑ There is no one or correct way to review literature and write a Literature Review. Much of this is contextual and based on your field and particular area of research.
- ❑ Before searching for sources, ask yourself:
 - ❑ What are my specific information needs?
 - ❑ What do I need to know?
 - ❑ Which topics (typically more than one) do I need to search?
 - ❑ Do I need to also look at research methods?
 - ❑ Any specific researchers/movements I need to examine?

Work Smarter

- ❑ Don't read an entire article to decide if it's something you want to include. Instead, carefully read the Abstract, the Literature Review, and the Conclusion. If it's still relevant, read the whole piece. If not, ditch it or save it in a "maybe" pile or folder.
- ❑ But... to be able to use a source in your Literature Review, you have to read beyond the Abstract. You should carefully read the entire piece so that you can write about the source thoroughly and honestly.

Work Smarter

- ❑ While reading, take very good notes. Working smarter in this area means that you may not have to reread several pieces later to remember which study found what.
- ❑ Some researchers use citation organizers like RefWorks to keep notes, attach PDFs, and create citations.
- ❑ No matter what you decide on, have a strategy and stick to it. A little work on the front end can save you a lot of time on the back end.

What to Take Note Of

- ❑ Full citation in your designated format. Don't wait to do this later. It's a huge pain!
- ❑ A full, detailed summary, including research question, findings, and implications. This will keep you from rereading later.
- ❑ Connections to other pieces, such as how the findings contradict or confirm others'.
- ❑ Any ideas or questions that came to mind while reading. Note ideas that both align with your research and current thinking and those that don't. This will be helpful later.
- ❑ The location of the source if you can't download and save it. You'll want to be able to find it again if needed.

Reading Notes Template


- ❑ I'm going to share a Word Document in the chat that could serve as a template for reading and taking notes.
- ❑ Modify it to fit your needs. This is what works best for MY field, so you'll likely need to adjust it for your own.

Reading with Two Minds

- ❑ Yes, you're reading for content, which is really important to your Literature Review.
- ❑ But, it's also important to notice *how* pieces are written in your field and journals.
 - ❑ How are Lit Reviews typically organized in my area of study?
 - ❑ How are the citations formatted and when do they appear?
 - ❑ How are the authors moving from one section to another?

Reading with Two Minds

- ❑ One of my grad school professors called this “writerly reading.” You read as a writer would, as someone who also needs to produce the thing you’re reading.
- ❑ So, while collecting, reading, and taking notes on sources, also take note of the writing to inform your own Literature Review drafting.



Questions
about reading &
taking notes?

3

Organizing Sources

Trying to Make Sense of
the “Bigger Picture”

Organizing Sources

- ❑ You can (should) start organizing your sources at the beginning of your research, reading, and note-taking, but you may not be able to see *how* to organize until you've gotten into this process a bit.
- ❑ Once you feel like you have a pretty good idea about what most of the literature is saying, you need to start thinking about how you're going to organize your sources and, therefore, your Literature Review.

Organizing Sources

- ❑ Important Note: It's impossible to provide you with one piece of advice that will apply to everyone's writing situation.
- ❑ There are many, many ways to organize a Literature Review, and your organization should be directly connected to your discipline and your research gap.
- ❑ Here are some general ideas to help you think.

Types of Literature Reviews

Thematic Review.

Literature reviews that are thematic are organized around a topic or issue. Typically, these themes are divided into sub-themes in some way.

Example: “What are students’ perspectives on learning about and proposing primary research in their first-year research writing course?”

Thematic Literature Reviews

Maybe reading the literature revealed three key areas where students struggle with research in first-year writing courses: Evaluating Sources, Attributing Sources, and Integrating Sources with Their Own Ideas

A Thematic Literature Review would outline these major themes from the readings.

Thematic Literature Reviews

1. Research shows that first-year students struggle with evaluating sources.
 - a. Source 1
 - b. Source 2
2. Additionally, researchers have found that first-year writers don't know how to correctly attribute sources in their research.
 - a. Source 2
 - b. Source 3
3. Another theme that researchers have noted is that first-year writing students have difficulty combining source materials with their own ideas.
 - a. Source 4
 - b. Source 5

Types of Literature Reviews

Chronological Review. A review done in this style would be organized by time periods or major movements in the research field.

Example: I could review literature based on the major movements in composition pedagogy: Current Traditional Rhetoric, Expressivism, Process, and Post-Process.

Chronological Literature Reviews

1. Current Traditional Rhetoric

- a. Berlin (1980)
- b. Crowley (1985)

2. Expressivism

- a. Elbow (1968; 1972)
- b. Murray (1968; 1984)

3. Process

- a. Emig (1968)
- b. Murray (1972)

4. Post-Process

- a. Kent (1999)
- b. Fulkerson (2001)

Types of Literature Reviews

Methodological Review. In this style, writers focus on the methods used by researchers.

Example: Composition studies has examined student preferences for research learning through a variety of methods: surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

The LR would be organized by sections, focusing on methods

Types of Literature Reviews

There are more types than these, but no matter how you decide to organize your Literature Review, it needs to be organized with purpose and help you to best highlight your gap.

- ❑ What kind of gap are you indicating?
- ❑ What's missing in the body of literature that you're adding to?
- ❑ Where and how does your study fit?

Again, Reading with Two Minds

- ❑ We're back to being a “writerly reader.” Pay attention to the types of Literature Reviews you're coming across in your research and reading.
- ❑ Looking at subheadings or creating a little outline of what you're reading can help you identify this.
- ❑ This may reveal trends in your field's research and help you see where you fit.

Organizing Tip: Source Matrix

Feak and Swales (2009) suggest making a source matrix to help impose order on your sources. Doing so might help you better “see” your sources. You can start generally and then reorder as you see more patterns.

They suggest using a table or spreadsheet.

TABLE 1. Summary of the Literature on the DC Concept

Author	Date	Provenance	Field	Perspective	Genre
Porter	1986	U.S.	RC	+	Article
Cooper	1989	U.S.	RC	-	Chapter
Harris	1989	U.S.	RC	-	Article
Swales	1990	U.S.	AL	+	Book
Lave and Wenger	1991	U.S.	Education	+	Book
Bizzell	1992	U.S.	RC	=	Chapter
Killingsworth and Gilbertson	1992	U.S.	TC	+	Book
Lyon	1992	U.S.	RC	-	Article
Porter	1992	U.S.	RC	+	Book
Olsen	1993	U.S.	TC	+	Article
Swales	1993	U.S.	AL	=	Article
Miller	1994	U.S.	TC	=	Article
Schryer	1994	Canada	TC	=	Article
Van Nostrand	1994	U.S.	TC	+	Chapter
Berkenkotter and Huckin	1995	U.S.	TC/AL	=	Book
Casanave	1995	Japan	AL	-	Chapter
Bex	1996	U.K.	AL	+	Book
Devitt	1996	U.S.	RC	=	Article
Grabe and Kaplan	1996	U.S.	AL	=	Book
Hanks	1996	U.S.	Anthropology	+	Book
Beaufort	1997	U.S.	RC	+	Article
Gunnarsson	1997	Sweden	Swedish studies	=	Article
Johns	1997	U.S.	AL	=	Book
Prior	1998	U.S.	RC	-	Book
Flowerdew	2000	Hong Kong	AL	+	Article
Pogner	2003	Denmark	Business	+	Article
Petersen	2007	Australia	Education	=	Article

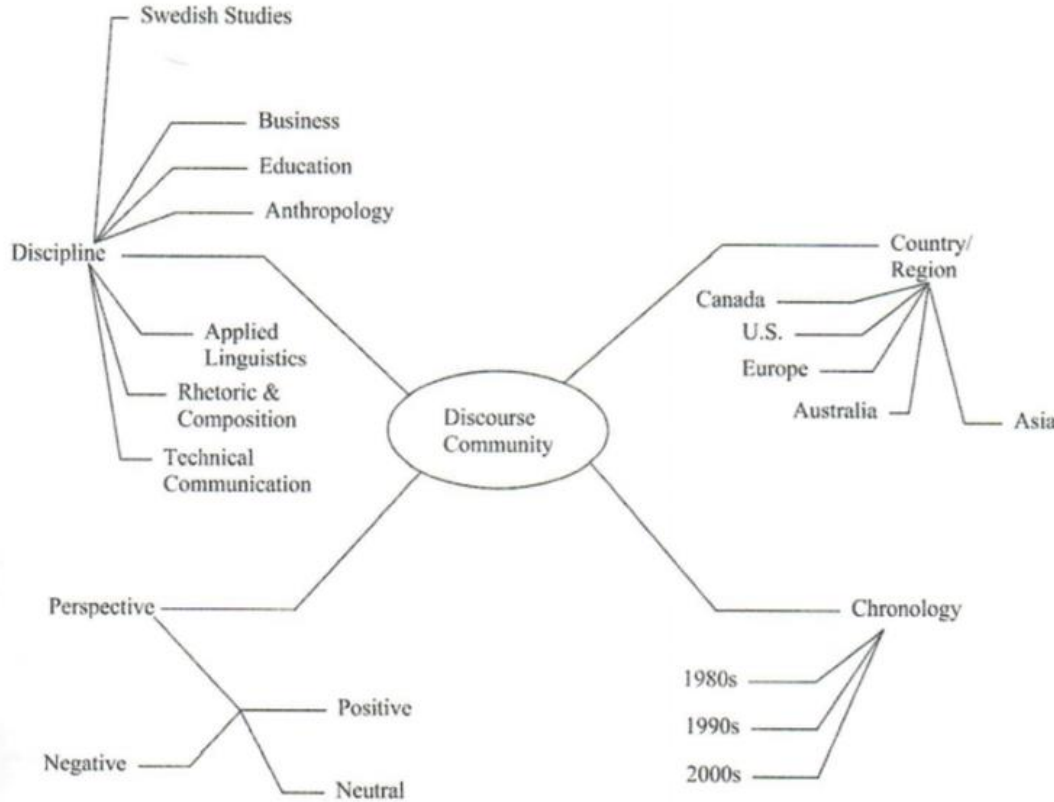
This table represents one way to organize a Source Matrix. This Matrix is in table form and provides an overview of many aspects of the literature: Date, Provenance, Field, Perspective, and Genre.

This might be a good first step in organizing your literature to see the “bigger picture” of what’s been said by whom, when, and how.

Organizing Tip: Mind Map

If the idea of a spreadsheet or table doesn't work for your brain, you can also consider creating a Mind Map of your sources (also mentioned by Feak and Swales, 2009)

Figure 2. Discourse Community Organizational Map



A Mind Map is another way of helping to bring order to your sources. This one from Feak and Swales (2009) provides a visual of the literature surrounding the topic of “discourse community.”




Questions about
organizing
sources?



Writing the Literature Review

Synthesizing Information and
Creating Your Own Research
Space



This next section focuses on the writing of a Literature Review, and while you're likely not at the writing stage, it's good to know where the research, reading, and organizing will end up.

Creating a Research Space

Remember CaRS and Swales? To create this research space, Swales found that there are three “moves” that all writers make in their Literature Reviews:

1. **Establish territory:** Writers orient readers to the general “terrain” of the field and/or topic. [the situation]
2. **Establish a niche:** Writers establish important features of their own research “territory” (gap) and show where they fit. [the problem]
3. **Occupy that niche:** Writers reveal exactly how their research fills the gap in the literature. [the solution]

The “Creating a Research Space” (CaRS) model is also an excellent way to help you analyze the pieces you’re reading.

- ❑ How are researchers “establishing their territory” in their pieces?
- ❑ Which steps are writers making to “establish their niche?” And would that work for me?
- ❑ How are they writing these moves and steps? Can I borrow and tweak their wording?

Move #1: Establishing Territory

Swales shows three possible steps writers can take to establish territory (outline the problem). You can do, 1, 2, or all 3 of these depending on your needs:

1. **Claim centrality:** show that your topic is important and relevant.
2. **Make topic generalizations:** discuss what is already known and believed about the topic.
3. ***Review previous items of research:** selectively synthesize and review previous work.

Move #1: Establishing Territory

1. Claim centrality

a. **Ask yourself:** Why is my research important at this current moment?

b. **Example:** “Recently, researchers have become interested in” ... “A central issue in X is”

2. Make topic generalizations

Move #1: Establishing Territory

3. Review previous items of research
 - a. **Ask yourself:** What would X author say to Y author? Does X extend Y or critique it?
 - b. **Example:** “Much research has examined...” or “While some have argued this, others have argued that.”

Move #2: Establishing a Niche

Swales identified four possible ways for writers to establish their niche (the problem). One of these steps is required and based on your Research Question.

1a. **Counter-claiming:** Challenging a broadly accepted assumption

1b. **Indicating a gap:** Showing something specific is missing from the research

1c. **Question-raising:** Raising a question or need

1d. **Continuing a tradition:** Extending previous knowledge in some way

Move #2: Establishing a Niche

1a. Counter-claiming

Ask yourself: Do you disagree with a popular opinion in your field? Do you think assumptions need to be re-examined?

Example: “The field has long believed X...; however, recent...”

1b. Indicating a gap

Ask yourself: What’s missing in the research?

Example: “Other studies have failed to recognize...”

Move #2: Establishing a Niche

1c. Question-raising

Ask yourself: What if...?

Example: “One question we could ask/consider...”

1d. Continuing a tradition

Ask yourself: What’s the next step in research?

Example: “Consequently, these factors need to be examined in more detail...” or “Research on X has mostly been restricted to ABC, so...”

Move #3: Occupying the Niche

Swales outlines three steps (step 1 has two options) that writers use to show the study's contribution (offer a solution)

1a. Outlining purposes or 1b. Announcing present research

2. Announcing principle findings (not for a proposal)

3. Indicating structure of piece

Move #3: Occupying the Niche

1a. Outlining purposes

Example: “The purpose of this investigation is...”

1b. Announcing present research

Example: “To respond to this call, I will answer the following questions...”

Move #3: Occupying the Niche

2. Announcing principle findings (not for a proposal)

Example: “The findings indicate a need for...” or
“The research suggests...”

3. Indicating structure of piece

Example: “The remainder of this paper is divided into five sections. The first section...”

Sample Literature Review Rubric

Category	Criterion	1	2	3
Coverage	Justified criteria for inclusion and exclusion from Literature Review	Did not discuss the inclusion or exclusion criteria	Discussed the literature included and excluded	Justified inclusion and exclusion of literature
Synthesis	Distinguished what has been done in the field from what needs to be done	Did not distinguish what has and has not been done.	Discussed what has and has not been done	Critically examined the state of the field.
	Place the topic or problem in broader scholarly literature.	Topic not placed in broader scholarly literature	Some discussion of broader scholarly literature	Topic clearly situated in broader scholarly literature
	Placed the research in the historical context of the field	History of topic not discussed	Some mention of the history of the topic	Critically examined history of topic
	Acquired and enhanced the subject vocabulary	Key vocabulary not discussed	Key vocabulary defined	Discussed and resolved ambiguities in definitions
	Articulated important variables and phenomena relevant to the topic	Key variables and phenomena not discussed	Reviewed relationships among key variables and phenomena	Noted ambiguities in literature and proposed new relationships
	Synthesized and gained a new perspective on the literature	Accepted literature at face value	Some critique of the literature	Offered a new perspective
Methodology	Identified the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used in the field and their advantages and disadvantages	Research methods not discussed	Some discussion of research methods used to produce claims	Critiqued research methods
	Related ideas and theories in the field to research methodologies	Research methods not discussed	Some discussion of appropriateness of research methods to warrant claims	Critiqued appropriateness of research methods to warrant claim
Significance	Rationalized the practical significance of the research problem	Practical significance of research not discussed	Practical significance discussed	Critiqued practical significance of research
	Rationalized the scholarly significance of the research problem	Scholarly significance not discussed	Scholarly significance discussed	Critiqued scholarly significance of research
Rhetoric	Was written with coherent, clear structure that supported the review	Poorly conceptualized, haphazard	Some coherent structure	Well developed, coherent

Taken from Swales & Feak (2009, p. 94)

This rubric comes from Feak and Swales (2009) and may provide some guidance for you as you self-assess your work and progress.

I'll also drop this file into the chat so that you can keep it for reference.

CaRS

Writing a Literature Review by Creating a Research Space

Move 1: Establish Territory [the situation]

A Literature Review generally starts by describing the overall "terrain" of the research area. Writers need to orient readers to the context and the specifics of what's to come. Writers do this using one or more of the following Steps.

Step 1: Claiming Importance

Writers describe the research problem, demonstrate the relevance or importance of their research topic, and provide evidence to support why the topic is important.

and/or

Step 2: Making Topic Generalizations

Writers provide statements about the current state of knowledge, consensus, practice or description of phenomena surrounding the topic.

Writing to Claim Importance

- In recent years, researchers have become increasingly interested in...
- Many investigators have turned attention to...

Writing to Make Generalizations

- A central issue in X is...
- It is well understood that...
- One thing researchers widely acknowledge is...

One last handout. This is a CaRs guide that you can use as you're attempting to make these moves to create your own research space.



Questions about Writing the Lit Review?

For additional help with planning, researching,
or drafting your Literature Review, make an
appointment!

Writing Center



Email and Zoom Sessions available!

Make an appointment:
www.unco.mywconline.com

Sources Used in this Presentation

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