

## Literature Review Guidelines

What is a literature review?

**A literature review is more than simply presenting a summary of articles.** A literature review is a survey of the state of knowledge on a specific topic and, that means that we need to pay attention to issues that cut across the readings in order to be able to make connections among several articles. Conducting a literature review is an important component and a basic skill of any research process. A literature review allows us to get an understanding of the current state of knowledge in a field or a specific topic. A literature review can serve three key purposes: 1) to identify areas where potential research is needed and where the researcher can contribute (theory testing, novel methods, etc.); 2) to identify examples of best practices or pitfalls of program implementation and policy, particularly in professional fields such as public administration; 3) to offer not just a synthesis of studies on a topic but also some critique. The critique is the mean to showing why a literature is incomplete and where there is thus room for contribution. What is missing in the literature? What could be improved upon regarding theory, research design, data, and analysis?

A literature review can be useful for those who want to pursue a career in academia as well as for those who are or who will be working as professionals in the private or public sector.

What specific issues do I need to pay attention in my literature review?

The research methods class so far has covered several topics that can be used as a guideline for you to identify themes across the readings. The following is only a list of issues and by no means is exhaustive, but it can help you in your journey.

- What type of research is more often found? (descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, or evaluation)
- What theory or theories are preferred by the scholars?
- What is the unit of analysis? (individuals, groups, institutions, etc.)
- How has the dependent variable been operationalized and defined?
- Is there an agreement about the causes or independent variables to be used?
- Is there agreement regarding the existing relationships?
- How have concepts been operationalized and what indicators have been used? Is there a high degree of agreement about how to measure or operationalize key concepts?
- What levels of measurement are more often used? (nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio)
- What type of research design is more often used? (non-experimental, quasi-experimental, case study)
- Is there a preferred statistical technique? (correlations, regression analysis, path analysis, etc)

- Which work(s) is (are) cited more often? Who are the experts in the field? Who are the classical authors?

### What are the minimum requirements?

I am establishing a threshold of **10 references minimum**. Acceptable references are work that has been subject to a peer review process of scholars. Acceptable includes journal articles and books mainly. Articles, working papers, and other reports downloaded from the internet from reliable sources or institutions that generate information (GAO, World Bank, UNDP, IMF, etc) are acceptable. A keyword search on your topic can be a good start. Be sure to also use existing journal browsers such as *JSTOR*, *Google Scholar* to conduct searches and download articles. Below there are a few links of these online journal sources. UTEP subscribe to several databases that you can access as student.

<https://scholar.google.com/>

<http://www.jstor.org/>

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journals>

<http://online.sagepub.com/>

<https://taylorandfrancis.com/>

### A point on style and reminder:

Literature reviews can be tedious to read and write when they consist merely of summaries of the literature under review. Hence, writing good literature reviews takes extensive organization and creativity. **You should not simply present discussions of studies in sequences that are random, chronological, or alphabetical.** You should organize the studies under review into groups by some logical order related to your critique and purpose of your own research design. This is where some creativity is required. Literature reviews could be organized by theories, methods, issues, problems, common questions, statistical techniques, conclusions, etc.

Also, make sure that you read published literature reviews for writing hints regarding organization and citation. Citing is important but can be handled in a manner that makes for more efficient and enjoyable reading, if done properly.

A good literature review needs to show that a question is worthy of study, meaning others have been studying it as well as that there is room for contribution. It thus sets up the research question of interest to you as well as to inform one about how to set up a research design based on flaws in existing studies. It would be a good idea to review the organization of your paper by the instructors to avoid going too far down the wrong road.

**Reference (more example will be provided)**

Reference should follow the Chicago Manual of style. For instance:

Book

Levy, John M. 2003. *Contemporary Urban Planning*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

Book with two authors

Hill, Michael and Peter Hupe. 2002. *Implementing Public Policy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Book with three or more authors

Ostrom, Elinor, Larry Schroeder, and Susan Wynne. 1993. *Institutional Incentives and Sustainable Development*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Multiple works by an author.

Levy, John M. 2003. *Contemporary Urban Planning*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

\_\_\_\_\_. 2003. *Book Name*. Place, STATE: Press

Article in an edited book

Swami, Bonu N. 2000. Government-Owned Companies as Instruments of State Action: Experiences from Botswana. In *Critical Issues in Cross-National Public Administration: Privatization, Democratization, Decentralization*, edited by Stuart S. Nagel, 25-40. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

Journal article paginated by volume

Peña, Sergio. 2002. Land Use Planning on the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Comparison of the Legal Framework. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 17: 1-20.

Journal article paginated by issue

Peña, Sergio. 2001. Public Participation and Water Supply: The Case of Two Communities on the USA-Mexico Border. *Water International* 26 (3): 390-399.

**Suggested Books**

Schmidt, Diane E. 2005. *Writing in Political Science: A Practical Guide*. New York, NY: Pearson Longman.

Ling Pan, M. 2004. *Preparing Literature Reviews: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Glendale,CA: Pyczak Publishing.

### **Think Strategically**

Implementing a survey and presenting results is part of your grade for the class. Think about your survey topic and link it to the literature review. This will help you to develop your survey instrument and to operationalize and measure concepts.