

## WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*While writing research papers, students are required to write a literature review. Although there have been many articles published on the process of how to write literature review, students and instructors are still facing some difficulties when it comes to the structure of a literature review. This article presents efficient and straightforward steps on how to teach students to write an appropriate literature review and alleviate students' anxiety in the process of designing literature review. This very study has been framed around following steps, such as: understanding what is a literature review (LR), analyzing synthesis matrix for LR, essential structure and approaches for writing literature review.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Synthesis Matrix, Literature Reviews (LR), LRL (The Literature Review Lesson), APA Style, Bibliographic Citations, Referencing.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to analyze scientific materials on the topic of “Writing a literature review”, summarize the main steps in structuring the literature review, and find a gap in this field of research. Ridley claims that, literature reviews are typical writing assignment in bachelor’s level courses, junior college courses, and graduate education. However, the process of writing in college as Gruenbraum claims, and especially writing literature reviews, could be intimidating and challenging for learners (Feak & Swales, 2009). This happens because there is lack of instructions on organizing structures for successful literature review. According to Cresswell, there are some goals to be accomplished through the literature in a research study: 1) it shares the outcomes of other studies with the reader that closely related to the study being reported (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990); 2) it connects a study to the larger, continuing dialog in the literature about a topic, completing gaps and extending previous studies (Marshall & Rossman); 3) it provides a special form for establishing the significance of the study (pp. 20, 21). Thus, a good literature review should cover specific themes and subheadings within a topic chosen for the research study.

#### **What is a literature review?**

Literature review is an information analysis and synthesis, focusing on findings and not just bibliographic citations, summarizing the substance of the literature and drawing conclusions from it (Educational Resources Information Center). There are some other views on definition of literature review (LR). For example, Cooper states that, literature review tries to describe, summarize, evaluate, identify or integrate the content of primary reports. Whereas, other

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scientists believe that literature review is an objective, thorough summary and critical analysis of the relevant available research and non-research literature on the topic being studied (Hart; Cronin, et al., 2008). A perfect literature review collects information for a certain topic from many sources. It should include empirical evidence on the research and row of key strategies. Literature review absolutely differs from an academic research paper, which aims to create new case or logic and contains a literature review as one of its parts. In a research paper, the literature is used as a basis and support for a new perception that the writer comes up with. The main goal of the LR, is summarizing and synthesizing the facts and ideas of others without adding new insights to the plot. Okoli & Schabram explain LR as the description of the paragraphs and quality of knowledge that is already exist, and readily demonstrates the reader the significance of previous work. Moreover, Literature review should be written in APA style for referencing and citing, that means, if a writer takes another author's idea or concept then s/he must respect it by acknowledging it (APA referencing style, 6<sup>th</sup> edition).

## **Synthesis matrix for literature review**

A literature review demands a synthesis of various subtopics to get a greater comprehension of the state of knowledge on a specific theme. It operates like a jigsaw puzzle. Interestingly, one best option for organizing literature review is the *synthesis matrix*. The synthesis matrix is a chart that allows a researcher to sort and categorize the different arguments presented on an issue (NC State University). Okoli & Schabram also noted that, a good matrix is obliged to be systematic, i.e. explicit, transparent, methodologically objective, standardized, structured, and reproducible.

## **The importance of structuring the literature review**

Zorn & Campbell argue by saying, that there is a lack of consensus regarding the structure of a literature review (LR). Surprisingly, no thorough research was conducted in terms of the structure of LR so far, which causes some difficulties for students to write a literature research. Moreover, learners find it difficult to synthesize articles in a literature review and thus are incapable of writing a coherent review according to Jonathan Cisco. He also points out, that direct instruction on how to write a literature review is of vital importance. In order to improve students' understanding of writing LR, Jonathan developed the LRL (The literature review lesson) program, where he uses four steps to teach. In summary, this practice was concluded to be both practical and efficient, and students learned the significance and easiness of using subheadings for theme-based paragraphs, rather than writing author-based summaries with disconnected sources.

## **Steps in the Literature Review**

### **1. Choosing a review topic**

Cronin, et al, proposes that the initial step to take, often the hardest thing, in writing a review of literature is choosing a topic. Usually the task is especially challenging when there is insufficient amount of knowledge in the content area. Next, Timmins add that talking to others, such as expert, or reading around a topic can also help to identify what areas of the subject the reviewer is interested in and may help indicate how much information exists on the topic. Following this step, it is crucial to go to the library for searching journal articles published based upon the topic. Cronin suggests that "having sufficient literature is also important, particularly when the review is an academic assignment". These academic assignments typically should be submitted in a

short period of time according to deadlines, for this reason having enough literature is prerequisite component of successful output.

## **2. Searching and selecting appropriate articles**

The next step is gathering information based on the chosen topic through multiple sources, such as library, journals, articles and the internet. Newell and Burnard (2006) explain that “comprehensiveness and relevance are what reviewers need to consider and add that the more specific the topic or question being searched is, the more focused the result will be” (Cronin et al, 2008). Perfect academic report will be more powerful when contradicting theories and findings are demonstrated with the position or prediction that student supports in his paper. As for Younger, (2004) Computer databases offer access to vast quantities of information, which can be retrieved more easily and quickly than using a manual search. These electronic databases could provide up-to-date information rather than just journals or books.

## **3. Analyzing and synthesizing the literature**

After collecting the articles the student is ready to analyze and identify the most important information and then synthesize the collection of articles by dividing into several groups. Cronin, et al, points, that it would be have benefit to start an initial classification and grouping of the articles by type of source. One of the helpful tools here is limitless ways of structuring a matrix (Sally, 2013).

## **4. Organization of writing the review**

The secret of a good literature review or research paper is the ability to reveal the findings in such a way that it demonstrates students’ basic knowledge in a clear and consistent way, as Cronin, et al considers. Consequently, literature review should consist of Introduction, main body, conclusion and reference list (Cronin et al, 2008).

## **CONCLUSION**

This article has examined every essential step in detail for producing literature review, based on the other authors’ researches and suggestions. Many research studies have been conducted in this field, but still there is a gap in terms of published instruction on how to write a literature review. While searching the internet students usually are not able to find relevant and sufficient data on this topic. As Boot and Beile inform, “Doctoral students seeking advice on how to improve their literature reviews will find little published guidance worth heeding. ... Most graduate students receive little or no formal training in how to analyze and synthesize the research literature in their field, and they are unlikely to find it elsewhere (p. 5)”. In conclusion, literature research writing is considered to be the milestone for any academic paper work; we cannot produce academic works without rich literature sources in particular sphere of education. So it is highly demanded for linguists to develop new theories and facts by making some analysis for the improvement of the ways for a writing literature review.

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