Preparing a Literature Review in the Behavioral and Social Sciences

Sergio Chaparro & Kelsey Cheshire
Today’s Goals

- Find relevant resources in the behavioral and social sciences
- Apply strategies to identify, retrieve, and synthesize your findings in a productive and efficient manner
- Learn how to digest scholarly articles and connect ideas for your review
What really is a literature review?
What do we know (or not know) about this particular issue/topic/subject?

A literature review is:

- Not a summary
- Not a list
- Not a fragmented or disconnected list of scholarly literature
- Expository
- Persuasive
- Readable
Scholarship is a conversation.

**Consider:** How will you reference previous works and how will your work guide future readers?

**A literature review requires:**

- Effective searching
- Quality and Reliable sources
- Your ability to synthesize the information
Example: Magnet Schools

This is just one resource searched!

Defining Your Research Question

- Literature Reviews are an iterative process!
  - So, are you interested?
- The balancing act:
  - Is your question too broad?
  - Or is your question too narrow?
  - Finding that balance
- Circling back
  - Has your research question changed after reviewing some literature?
Example Research Question

Social Worker decides:
I'm interested in helping students with learning disabilities by influencing policy.

Starts narrowing:
“What educational policies exist that affect students with learning disabilities?”
“What learning disability am I most interested in?”
“Where can I enact change?”

Final Research Question:
“How should we reform educational policies that exist in Virginia to better assist elementary students that have dyslexia?”

Social Worker decides:
I'm interested in helping students with learning disabilities by influencing policy.
What is relevant literature for your research question?
Search Strategy

- **Selection of the most appropriate resources to search**
  - Examine database’s scope
  - Examine indexes or thesauri

- **Selection of the most relevant words to search for**
  - Refinement of the search terms

- **Limiting the results**
  - Based on selection criteria
  - Consider features of database
Search Strategy, continued

● Document, document, document!
  ○ Where? How? What?

● Appropriate for Behavioral and Social Sciences
  ○ Subject specific databases
  ○ Also, interdisciplinary databases
    ■ You can do both at once!
Searching Multiple Databases at Once

[Image of a search interface with options to choose databases and search fields]

[Small popup window showing a list of databases to choose from]
Databases by Subject

Search articles, journals, books, media and more

All Databases

Popular Databases
1. PubMed/MEDLINE
   The primary database of information in biomedical and biological sciences.
2. Academic Search Complete
   Comprehensive scholarly multi-disciplinary full-text database. Includes over 5,500 full-text periodicals and indexing abstracting for over 9,500 journals. Covers science, social sciences, mathematics, engineering, and many other subjects.
3. Web of Science
   Citation databases including Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Science Citation Index, and Social Sciences Citation Index for searches by cited reference, topic, and author.

By Subject
- Arts
  - Art Education
  - Design
  - History and Criticism
  - Performing Arts
  - Visual Arts
- Business
  - Recommended
- Health Sciences
  - Allied Health
  - Complementary/Alternative Medicine
  - Consumer Health
  - Data
  - Dental
  - Genetics
  - Medicine
Managing Your Findings

● Explore the tools available to you!
  ○ Citation Management Software
    ■ Organize and cite!

● Your lit review loves the cloud!
  ○ Google Drive
    ■ Great for collaboration!
Organizational Strategy

- Wide variety of approaches to synthesize your research
- The key component here is to identify something that suits you and makes you feel comfortable.
  - There is nothing wrong with pencil and paper!
- One suggested approach:
  - Matrix Design
Example Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, date</th>
<th>Research question; rationale</th>
<th>Theoretical framework</th>
<th>Methods: sample, study type, etc.</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
<th>Limitations, gaps</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
<th>Implications for future research &amp; practice</th>
<th>Themes that emerge</th>
<th>Other important issues</th>
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The library is here to help!
Any Questions?

Images courtesy of Unsplash.com