Literature Reviews (Literature Research)*

Every good scientist conducts a literature review before doing research. This is a tool to help you narrow the question you are asking, help determine your procedure and see what results others have obtained regarding your question.

There are two types of sources that you can use for a literature review:

1. *Primary sources* are first-hand accounts such as diaries, patient charts, letters, eyewitness accounts, professional journals, autobiographies, research reports, and information collected from interviews and questionnaires. These are the best sources.
2. *Secondary sources* are second-hand accounts such as histories, biographies, textbooks and anything else that gives an account of a primary source.

You should use a combination of primary and secondary sources in a literature review.

How to get information for a literature review:
You should understand your topic first before you use the on-line sources available to you. You will not be able to understand what the research papers are saying unless you do this first. It takes some time initially but will save you grief and headaches later. On-line sources can include those in Proquest or EBSCO.

Questions to answer when reviewing articles:

- What is the specific question that my review will help answer?
- What type of review am I looking for? (example: methods, policy, quantitative research)
- What will I use for the review?(journals, books, government documents, etc)
- How good did I conduct my search? Do I have enough or too much information?
- Did I analyze the information and not just summarize it? Did I look at the strengths and weaknesses of each source?
- Did I review any that contradict my view?
- It my review relevant, appropriate and useful?

Remember: A literature review is meant to help guide you when you write an experiment or paper. You need to see what exists out there already in order to have a good paper or experiment. Don't try to recreate the wheel.

Selection of Sources:

- Books- look at author's credentials, scan table of contents, index, bibliography, charts and tables and read the preface.
- Articles- read abstract, authors credentials and scan the hypothesis and methods sections and read the conclusion and summary.
- Remember to note the author, title and year of publication. It is best to use the most recent most recent articles, not older than 7 years.

When each book or article is reviewed, you should be thinking about the following questions:

- What was the problem or question that was being tested?
- Is it stated clearly?
- Do you feel the problem could have been looked at better from a different way?
- Has the author conducted a literature review to support his question?
- How good was the research that was conducted? Did it follow good design, are the measurements accurate, is the analysis of the data accurate and relevant to the question, are the conclusions valid based on the data and analysis?
- Is it written objectively or is it written to "prove" the authors point of view?
- Are the arguments or conclusions logical and easy to follow?
- What are the strengths and limitations to how the author conducted his research?
- How does this source relate to the question that I am asking?

Suggestions for gathering information using index cards:

1. Orange index card- quotes from the literature
2. Blue index card- summarize information from the source
3. Green index card-record insights or idea
4. White index card - source information
    a. Author name
    b. Complete title
    c. Date, publisher, place of publication and edition
    d. Journal or article, date in detail, pages of article
    e. Call number or identification for future reference

*Adapted from www.olemiss.edu/depts/writing_center/grabstract.html