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“Don’t Fear the Literature Review!” A Review of Literature Review Teaching Tools

Kimberly S. Westbrooks
Jacksonville State University

Paula Barnett-Ellis
Jacksonville State University, pbarnett@jsu.edu

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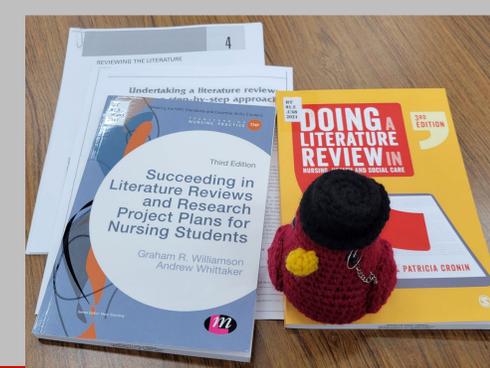
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“Don’t Fear the Literature Review!” A Review of Literature Review Teaching Tools

Kim Westbrook and Paula Barnett-Ellis

Houston Cole Library, Public Services



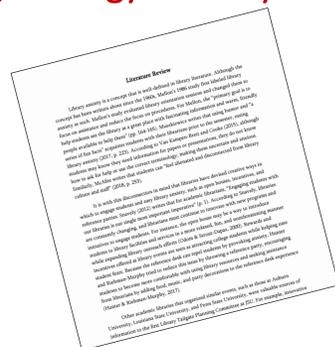
Introduction

The literature review is a difficult aspect of research methods courses. The act of artfully weaving together content from an array of scholarly sources is a challenge to teach. This presentation introduces faculty members to literature review teaching strategies, including multiple pathways to better understand a topic's pertinent literature.

Aggregated General Teaching Methodology

- Appraise your findings. Consider the authors' motivations and sources.
- Summarize authors' main arguments.
- Compare and contrast studies. Are the findings similar or different? Why?
- Synthesize the key concepts of your readings. Combine ideas into a coherent whole.
- Identify gaps in the literature. What is missing?
- Stop when you keep finding the same resources over and over.

Teaching Strategy: Share your process



Teaching Strategy: Jigsaw Method

“This [Jigsaw] method walks students through writing a literature review without leading them through the Valley of the Shadows of Stress” (Booker, 2021, p. 59).

- Break students into groups
- Each group is responsible for one sub-topic of a class topic
- Information found is shared
- Information found is put together

Tutorials

- Give step-by-step information
- Repeat information, addressing different learning styles
- Require feedback indicating understanding
- Require understanding before moving to next concept

Student Barriers to Understanding

- Anxiety
- Broad, overwhelming topic scope
- Competing priorities
- Challenges with organization/record-keeping
- Culturally-discouraged help-seeking behaviors
- Lack of information literacy
- Reading deficiencies
- Time management
- Vocabulary

Simplifying the Literature Search

- Devote a class to library information instruction
- Encourage the use of subject specific databases
- Incentivize appropriate keywords via graded exercises with feedback
- Recommend citation mining
- Require librarian consultation(s)
- Spotlight library subject guides



Tools to Dissect the Literature

- Advanced note-taking
- Annotated bibliographies
- Article summaries
- Coding
- Concept mapping
- Group discussion
- Matrices

Citation Management: RefWorks

RefWorks, a web-based citation manager, is available to students.

- Help students create and organize citations.
- Export citations from databases in the preferred format.
- Insert in-text citations and create reference pages in Microsoft Word or Google Docs.
- Library RefWorks log-in page: <https://refworks.proquest.com>
- Other citation management tools, such as Zotero and Mendeley, offer some of these tools with varying rates of success.

Note: Careful review of citations is still needed with any resource.

Additional Resources

- Style manuals
- Literature review handbooks
- Writing guides
- Word style guide tools
- Word templates
- Citation generators

References:



Beware the Confusing Vocabulary

- Literature Review – a portion of an academic paper.
- Literature Review – the act of looking at information on a topic.
- Literature Review – a type of academic paper focusing on information on a specific topic within a specific time span.

Types include:

- Systematic review
- Narrative review
- Scoping review
- Meta-Analysis

See examples to the right.

