

Preparing Literature Reviews

Qualitative and Quantitative
Approaches

Second Edition

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Chapter 8

Planning and Writing the First Draft

At this point, you should have collected the literature relevant to your topic, read it and made notes, and evaluated the literature that reports the results of research. Now you should begin planning and writing your first draft.

Guideline 8.1

Before preparing an outline, review your notes and group them according to content.

Grouping by content is often superior to putting sources in chronological order unless the primary intent of your review is to synthesize information on the history of some topic.¹ Thus, for a literature review of variables associated with investment strategies, you might group together those that deal with gender differences. In another group, you might have those that deal with age differences in investment strategies. In yet another, you might group those that name and define various strategies. Looking at your groupings should help you prepare an outline for your literature review.

Guideline 8.2

When beginning to build a topic outline, consider the order in which other writers have presented material on your topic.

For instance, if your topic is regional differences in voting patterns in national elections, consider the various ways and the order in which material was presented by previous authors. Did they begin by defining what they mean by voting patterns? Did they define the regions of interest to them? Did they provide a historical overview and, if so, where did they do so? Near the beginning? Near the end? Noticing patterns such as these should give you some ideas on how to organize your outline.²

¹ Even for a historical review, you should group according to content within each historical time period.

² Note that even a brief literature review that precedes a report of original research will have some type of organization even if it does not have subheadings for major content groupings.

Guideline 8.3

Consider your first topic outline as a tentative one that is subject to change.

This guideline is suggested for two reasons. First, if you are considering a substantial amount of material on a topic, you might feel overwhelmed as to how to organize it. Considering the outline for it as only tentative and subject to change may make you feel more comfortable and help you overcome initial writer's block. After all, it is only a tentative first stab, not the final product. Second, you will be more willing to change it after showing it to others (such as your instructor) for feedback.

Unless your instructor requires that you strictly follow an approved outline, feel free to change it (by adding, subtracting, or rearranging topics) during the writing process. Good writers often change directions several times during the process of writing an important work.

It is important to put your outline in writing. While highly skilled writers sometimes can work effectively without a written outline, it is unwise for most writers to use only a mental outline.

Example 8.3.1 shows a topic outline. Note that it starts with a general introduction. In a thesis or dissertation, the introduction might be a separate chapter (usually Chapter 1) from the literature review (usually Chapter 2). In journal articles, the introduction is typically integrated with the literature review, with references to literature being referred to as early as the first sentence. Check with your instructor as to which arrangement he or she prefers.

Example 8.3.1

*A topic outline for a literature review:*³

Title: The Effects of Praise on Children's Intrinsic Motivation

General Introduction to the Topic

Defining Praise and Motivation

Two Contrasting Views

Praise Enhances Intrinsic Motivation

- Beneficial mechanisms

Praise Undermines Intrinsic Motivation

- Detrimental mechanisms

Conceptual Variables Influencing the Effects of Praise on Intrinsic Motivation

Sincerity

Performance Attributions

- Attributions as mediators
- Ability versus effort praise
- Person versus process praise
- Overview of attributions

Continued on next page.

³ This outline is loosely based on the work of Henderlong & Lepper (2002).

Example 8.3.1 (continued)

Perceived Autonomy

- Praise as extrinsic reward
- Informational versus controlling aspects of praise
- Gender differences in perceived autonomy
- Overview of autonomy

Standards and Expectations

- The moderating function of standards and expectations
- Gender differences in familiarity of standards and expectations
- Overview of standards and expectations

Summary of Conceptual Variables

A Cultural Caveat

Directions for Future Research

Appropriate Control Conditions

Appropriate Dependent Measures

Appropriate Manipulations

Summary and Conclusions

Note that in the outline in Example 8.3.1, the main headings are in bold, the second-level headings are in italics, and the third-level headings are indented with dashes in front of them. Any arrangement of this sort is acceptable if it is only a working topic outline for your use while writing. If you must submit an outline to an instructor, you might want to use the method commonly taught in English composition courses: Roman numerals for first-level headings, capital letters of the alphabet for second-level headings, and so on.

When writing your literature review, consult with the recommended style manual for your university or for your field of study for guidance on how to format the levels of headings. For example, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* has specific guidelines for various levels of headings, some of which are shown in Example 8.3.2.

Example 8.3.2

Some levels of headings from the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association:

Level one:

Centered Uppercase and Lowercase Heading

Level two:

Centered, Italicized, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading

Level three:

Flush Left, Italicized, Uppercase and Lowercase Side Heading⁴

⁴ American Psychological Association (2001, p. 113).

↳ Guideline 8.4

Consider filling in your outline with brief notes (including unique identifiers) before beginning to write your review.

Guideline 5.5 in Chapter 5 suggests that you give each piece of literature a unique identifier, such as the surname of the first author. You can start filling in your outline by writing notes within the outline that indicate which material will be presented under each heading (and subheading) and which sources will be used. This is done in Example 8.4.1 below, where the notes are shown in smaller type in brackets below some of the early topics in the outline in Example 8.3.1.

Example 8.4.1

A topic outline for a literature review, with notes and identifiers on what to cover and the sources to be used. Notes and identifiers are shown in brackets:⁵

Title: The Effects of Praise on Children’s Intrinsic Motivation

General Introduction to the Topic

[Topic is important because praise is so widely used: Smith & Small; Doe.]

Teachers’ and parents’ beliefs on the importance of praise: Doe; Brown.]

Failure of parents and teachers to recognize that different schedules of praise may have different effects: Blackwell & Wright; Logan; Manchester & Lake.]

Defining Praise and Motivation

[Use Black’s definition of “praise.”]

Define “intrinsic motivation” and “extrinsic motivation” separately by paraphrasing definitions in Doe & Barnes.]

Stress that this review is on *intrinsic* motivation only. Justify this restriction using Noble & Smith’s rationale. Mention Jackson’s theory, which supports Noble & Smith.]

Two Contrasting Views

Praise Enhances Intrinsic Motivation

[Describe circumstances and studies that support enhancement: Franklin & James; Smith & Smith; Jackson, Washington, & Adams.]

Outline theory that explains this phenomenon: Blackwell, Wright, & Logan; Honeywell; Langly & Sears.]

Provide details on Doe’s classic study with attention to circumstances when enhancement was found in her study. Mention replications: Bruce, Harris, & Corwin; Moeller; Brahm & Lake; Doe.]

⁵ This outline is loosely based on the work of Henderlong & Lepper (2002).

Notice in Example 8.4.1, the reviewer is making the topic outline more concrete by adding cryptic notes. Also notice that several of the notes have more than one source. For instance, the works of Smith & Small *and* Doe will be cited for the first note made in the outline. In addition, it is important to notice that a given source may appear in several places within the outline. For example, Doe is cited for the first note as well as in the last one in the example.⁶ This repetition of sources in various places in the outline occurs because it is an outline built around *topics*, not around individual pieces of literature. Thus, a work such as Doe's may have information that is relevant to more than one topic within the outline.

If they are readily available when you make your cryptic notes within your topic outline, relevant page numbers should be included.

↳ **Guideline 8.5**

Establish the importance of the topic that you are reviewing in the introductory paragraphs of your review.

When following this guideline, the word "importance" may be used as illustrated in Example 8.5.1, in which literature is cited to justify the assertion that a topic is important.

Example 8.5.1

A statement of importance from the introduction to a literature review:

The importance of values in social work is indisputable, for values represent a fundamental working element in social work practice and ethics (Bartlett, 1958;...Loewenberg & Dolgoff, 1992). Social work values embody social workers' preferred views of people, what they prefer for people, and how they work with people (Levy, 1973). Values guide social work practice, and, ultimately, express social workers' commitments to action.⁷

The importance of a topic can also be established by citing the statistics on the numbers of people (or percentages of people) affected by the topic.⁸ This is illustrated in Example 8.5.2. Even though it involves reporting statistics, this approach can be used by both those writing qualitatively oriented and those writing quantitatively oriented literature reviews.

Example 8.5.2

Importance of a topic (ADHD) established by citing statistics:

In the last decade, there has been a rapid rise in the reported prevalence rates of ADHD. Robinson, Sclar, Skaer, and Galin (1999) examined the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey data for the years 1990 through 1995. They found

⁶ Of course, if two different authors have the same surname, add first names (such as Doe, Monica and Doe, John) or years of publication (such as Doe [2000] and Doe [2002]). Using years of publication is desirable if the author has written more than one source that will be cited in the review.

⁷ Pinto (2002, p. 85).

⁸ A topic might be justified in terms of the seriousness of the consequences for a *small* percentage of people. For instance, a life-threatening disease that affects only a fraction of one percent of the population is an important topic because of its potentially devastating effects.

that the number of office-based visits documenting a diagnosis of ADHD increased from 947,208 in 1990 to 2,357,833 in 1995. This increase in diagnosis was matched with a 2.9-fold increase in the number of ADHD individuals prescribed stimulant medication.⁹

The U.S. Census Bureau, which can be accessed via the Internet at www.census.gov/, is a good source of statistics on many matters. One of the statistics from this Web site is used in Example 8.5.3 to help establish the importance of the topic.

Example 8.5.3

Example of establishing the importance of a topic using Census Bureau statistics:

Almost 30% of all children are currently being raised in single-parent homes and have a nonresident parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999).¹⁰

🔗 Guideline 8.6

Avoid vague references to statistics—especially in the first paragraph of your review.

Many literature reviews *inappropriately* begin with sentences such as the two shown in Example 8.6.1. They are inappropriate unless they are followed shortly afterwards with specific statistics that support them. Without statistical support (even in qualitatively oriented reviews), nonstatistical statements about statistical matters cause insightful readers to wince at the thought that you are giving your personal impressions of what statistics *might* reveal instead of being a careful researcher who has collected relevant statistics from the literature. (If you insist on *not* following this guideline, you should at least make a statement to this effect: “It is *my general impression* that economists are increasingly interested in....”)

Example 8.6.1

Two statements with vague references to statistics (inappropriate unless they are followed by specific supporting statistics with sources):

First statement (inappropriate):

In recent years, economists increasingly have become interested in the XYZ theory of economic trends and have.... [Note: In which recent years? How does the author know there is an increase? What is the size of the increase?]

Second statement (inappropriate):

More and more teachers are facing the dilemma of integrating special-needs children into their classrooms without adequate training on techniques and.... [Note: How many are “more and more”? What is the source of this vague quantity?]

⁹ Purdie, Hattie, & Carroll (2002, p. 63).

¹⁰ Bloomer, Sipe, & Ruedt (2002, p. 77).

Guideline 8.7

Provide specific definitions of major variables early in the literature review.

Definitions of major variables are essential to avoid miscommunication between you and your readers. Also, differences in how various researchers define variables may help to explain discrepancies in results across studies, which is an issue that should be addressed in your review. Specifically, those researchers using one type of definition may be consistently finding results different from those using another type, a possibility that you should consider while writing your review. For instance, if one researcher defines “physical child abuse” as “any form of physical punishment” while another researcher defines it to exclude mild forms of spanking with an open hand, you would expect differences between the results of the two studies.

It is acceptable (and sometimes desirable) to use a previously published definition as long as you cite its source, as is done in Example 8.7.1. The first sentence in the example provides the definition while the two sentences that follow help clarify the definition by citing some characteristics of those who fit it. If there is a previously published definition that prevails in the literature you are reviewing, it is a good idea to use it as your definition also for the sake of consistency in communications, unless you think it is a flawed definition, in which case you should point out its flaws and offer your own definition.

Example 8.7.1

A definition attributed to another source (an acceptable practice):

Job burnout has been defined as a syndrome characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from excessive demands on the energy, strength, and resources of the worker (Spicuzza & De Voe, 1982). Workers who suffer from job burnout are less effective on the job. They are more likely to be emotionally exhausted, depersonalize their clients, feel less personal accomplishment, and feel less commitment to their occupation (Miller et al., 1995).¹¹

Guideline 8.8

Write an essay that moves logically from one point to another. Do not write a string of annotations.

An annotation is a summary of a piece of literature. Most academic literature (especially journal articles) has already been annotated, and the annotations have been published both in print and on the Web. As a reviewer of literature, it is your task to make an original contribution—not just annotate literature again—and write an essay that moves logically from topic to topic. References should be cited as needed, and a given reference may be cited repeatedly in different parts of your essay in order to support various points you are making.

¹¹ Franze, Foster, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, & Lambert (2002, p. 259).

An essay will result if you build and follow a *topic* outline (see Guidelines 8.1 through 8.4). In short, your narrative should move from topic to topic as indicated on your outline, not from the work of one author to the work of another author.

Guideline 8.9

When they are available, use more than one reference to support each point you make while avoiding very long strings of references for a single point.

Example 8.9.1, in which two sources are cited for a single point, illustrates this guideline.

Example 8.9.1

An example of citing two sources for a given point:

Interest groups purchase advertising space in mass media to explain their views because it is an economical means of communicating their message to the general public, and they believe that their ads have had an effect on the general public (Kollman, 1998; Loomis & Sexton, 1995).¹²

On the other hand, do *not* cite very long strings of references for a single point. Instead, cite a limited number of the more important ones, starting with “e.g.,” as illustrated in Example 8.9.2.

Example 8.9.2

An example of using “e.g.,” when there are many sources for a single point:

The XYZ theory has wide support (e.g., Smith, 2001; Jones, 2002).

If you want to stress that there are a very large number of supporting studies (and/or theoretical literature), you can also make a statement such as the one in Example 8.9.3, in which the number of studies is mentioned but only a few are cited.

Example 8.9.3

An example of using “see especially” when there are many sources for a single point and mention is made of the number of studies that have such support:

The XYZ theory has wide support, with 14 studies published within the last decade that provide supporting data (see especially: Smith, 2001; Jones, 2002).

A major exception to this guideline sometimes occurs when students are writing literature reviews for theses and dissertations, which are, in essence, long-term take-home tests (i.e., performance tasks). Students writing these documents may be asked to cite *all* relevant literature as a test of their ability to locate it and appropriately cite it. Occasionally, this may also be required for a class paper or senior project for the same reason. Consult with your instructor for further clarification on this issue.

¹² Hunter (2002, p. 390).

↳ Guideline 8.10

Write the literature review using your own words; use quotations very sparingly.

Strings of quotations will result in a paper that is uneven in style. Even more important, as a reviewer of literature, you are expected to make an original contribution by recasting the literature you have read in your own words so that your entire narrative makes sense logically, flows smoothly, and is cohesive.

The main exception to this guideline is when an idea is expressed so aptly that its impact or intensity achieved through the use of rhetorical devices would be lost in paraphrase. Arguably, the impact of the quotation in Example 8.10.1 would be lost if it were merely paraphrased.

Example 8.10.1

A quotation whose impact might be lost in paraphrase:

Willis (1994), for example, writes that “to succeed as an athlete can be to fail as a woman, because she has, in certain symbolic ways, become a man” (p. 36).¹³

Be especially cautious about beginning your literature review with a direct quotation from the literature. Remember, it is *your* literature review, and it makes sense for you to begin it in your own words. An exception is when a quotation is exceedingly apt and very clearly sets the stage for what you are about to write. In scientific writing, there seldom is a quotation that meets the standards for this exception.

↳ Guideline 8.11

Explicitly state what you think are reasonable conclusions based on the literature for each major subtopic that you cover.

It is not sufficient merely to present the evidence from the literature without discussing at least the major conclusions that you think are supported by it, as illustrated in Example 8.11.1.

Example 8.11.1

A tentative conclusion based on a review of the literature:

In sum, despite discrepant results in a minority of studies, this review of the literature on XYZ clearly suggests that the ABC model is more predictive of future alcohol behavior than the DEF model when the entire body of literature on this topic is considered.

Remember to avoid using the words “prove” and “proof” when following this guideline. See Guideline 7.1 in Chapter 7.

¹³ Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell (2002, p. 172).

Note that Guideline 8.11 should be followed in conjunction with the next three guidelines.

↳ Guideline 8.12

Consider theories and/or models when reaching conclusions.

This guideline is suggested because conclusions regarding theories and models are likely to be more important than conclusions about simple factual matters because they have more implications. Example 8.11.1 above illustrates a statement that refers to models.

If you reach a conclusion that a widely accepted theory may be flawed or invalid, reread your literature review to be certain that you have sufficient supporting material to reach such a conclusion (one that runs contrary to prevailing opinion). Also, check to see that you have included all the relevant literature. If so, then feel free to make statements that run counter to the mainstream.

↳ Guideline 8.13

Critique the research you cite, which will help you show your readers why you have reached particular conclusions.

Close examination of the literature on almost any complex topic will reveal at least minor contradictions (and sometimes major ones) in the results of the research on the topic. In general, consider basing conclusions on the studies with superior research methodologies. (Chapter 7 provides a number of guidelines for evaluating research.)

Note that if you fail to point out that one research study is superior to another, your readers are likely to assume that both are about equal in their research methodology. If they are not equal in your opinion but you do not say so, you may be misleading your readers. Example 8.13.1 shows a potentially misleading statement about two groups of contradictory studies followed by one that differentiates between the two groups in terms of methodology.

Example 8.13.1

A statement that misleads because no differentiation is made between studies:

Several studies (Doe, 2002; Smith, 2001) provide support for the contention that XYZ is correct. In contrast, other studies (Jones, 2001; Long, 2002) fail to support this contention.

A statement that makes distinctions based on research methodology:

While several studies (Doe, 2002; Smith, 2001) provide support for the contention that XYZ is correct, others (Jones, 2001; Long, 2002) fail to support this contention. It is important to note that the latter studies used more representative samples than the former, lending credence to the conclusion that XYZ is possibly incorrect.

Example 8.13.2 shows a brief part of the conclusion from a literature review in which the writers conclude that goal-setting theory is supported by the research literature. Notice that they point out flaws in studies that fail to support the theory.

Example 8.13.2

A conclusion about goal-setting theory that is based on a critique of research methods:

The effects of goal setting are very reliable. Failures to replicate them are usually due to errors, such as not matching the goal to the performance measure, not providing feedback, not getting goal commitment....¹⁴

↳ Guideline 8.14

Point out gaps in the literature, explain why they are important, and mention them in your conclusions.

The conclusions that you reach near the end of your literature review may need to be stated as being tentative if there are no (or only a few) studies on some important aspects of issues that are highly relevant to your topic. When this is the case, point out why the gap hinders our understanding of the phenomenon. This is illustrated in Example 8.14.1.¹⁵

Example 8.14.1

A statement about a gap in the literature and its importance:

With the exception of research into the influence of sibling smoking status on youth imitation, few studies have examined the role of nonparental family members in smoking onset. This may be a fruitful area for investigation because the extended family plays a more salient role in the lives of children in some nonwhite cultures.^{23,24} [This is important because] extended family members...may engage in meaningful anti-smoking socialization or may contribute to teen smoking through the same mechanisms as parents and siblings.¹⁶

↳ Guideline 8.15

Consider concluding your review with suggestions for future research.

Having carefully considered and synthesized the research on your topic, you are in an especially good position to make suggestions for possible fruitful areas for future research. Often, these suggestions will be for research that will help to fill out the gaps you identified (see Guideline 8.14). They may also refer to conducting research that is less methodologically flawed than the research conducted to date.

¹⁴ Locke & Latham (2002, p. 714).

¹⁵ Note that superscripts 23 and 24 in example 8.14.1 refer to references in the original review that support the statement about the gap. Superscript 16 identifies the reference for the quotation shown in the example.

¹⁶ Kegler et al. (2002, p. 475).

Concluding Comments

By reading a large number of well-crafted literature reviews (such as those that typically appear in journals), you will see a variety of structures and techniques used to introduce a topic, critically summarize what is known about it, write a cohesive essay that synthesizes literature, reach defensible conclusions, and make sound suggestions for future research.

If you have carefully built a topic outline as described at the beginning of this chapter and followed the remaining guidelines, you should have a suitable *first draft* of your literature review. In the next two chapters, we will consider some additional refinements you might use to improve your first draft when you rewrite it to produce a second draft. The old truism deserves mention here: The key to effective writing is rewriting.

Exercise for Chapter 8

1. If you have already gathered literature, name several of the groupings you will use. If you have not gathered literature yet, name some groupings you anticipate that you will use. See Guideline 8.1.
2. Notice that “Defining Praise and Motivation” is the second major heading in Example 8.3.1. What major terms do you anticipate defining in your literature review? Will you define them in a separate section with its own major heading such as in the example, *or* will you integrate the definitions into your narrative (defining each when it is first introduced)?
3. Examine Example 8.3.1. Excluding the title, how many levels of headings are shown? How can you distinguish among the levels in the example?
4. Have you been assigned a style manual that covers formatting matters such as levels of headings and other matters regarding presentation of material? If so, name it. If not, will you use a style manual? If yes, which one?
5. Examine Model Literature Review 6 on religion-accommodative counseling. Read the title and then read the first- and second-level headings (without reading the text). To what extent do the headings help you get a sense of what is covered in the review? In your opinion, is the review long enough to justify the number of headings and subheadings the authors used?
6. What is your opinion on Guideline 8.4? Do you plan to follow it? Why? Why not?

Organization of Chapters

Introduction - includes context and directions to the reader on what will be found in the chapter.

This paragraph(s) provides the initial guidance to the reader on what he/she should expect to see in the chapter – an advanced organizer if you wish of both why he/she should be reading this and what the contents will be.

Example: This chapter, Chapter II, the Review of Literature, provides information that situates this research study in the field and an analysis of literature from the following fields: Area A, Area B, Area C, Area D. In each of these areas, I have analyzed the relevant research studies related to the area and identified what contributes to my study and what is lacking that this study will address. The chapter concludes with a summary of the fields of literature and shows why and how this literature contributes to the theoretical base for my study.

The presentation of the ideas should be in the same order as listed in the paragraph – this is true for any listing which you expand with details. The order of the expansion should parallel the listing's order.

Review of Literature in Area A

Begins with another introductory paragraph situating Area A in your study and the field and explaining to the reader what topics/literature you will be including

Is followed by the relevant literature in Area A in the same order that you indicated in the introductory paragraph

Concludes with a summary of the contributions of the literature in Area A to your study.

Review of Literature in Areas B, C, D, etc.

Follows the same model as Area A with introduction and summary

After all areas have been presented

Summary of Chapter

The summary of the chapter should, to some degree, restate the intention presented in the introductory paragraph with details drawn from each section summary. The summary should explain, by referring to previous statements, your conclusion from the work that you have presented.

In the case of a literature review, you can draw on the summaries from each section to explain how the literature has provided you guidance for your study – the literature, as you have shown, does not address your topic, addresses your topic in another area but not specifically as you will, shows that there is conflict in interpretation and analysis, etc. The reader should, at this point, understand clearly why you have included the areas you have in the review.

This model works for all chapters in a dissertation or for a journal article – **Bottom Line** - you need to tell the reader what to expect and why this is important to your story and to them and then, after doing that, tell them what you have told him/her in a summary/conclusion section.