

Writing Effective Literature Reviews

Integrative Research Project - July 2008

Thursday, July 24, 2008

- Literature reviews have a purpose! They are not a list of related work.
- Purpose:
 - Convey what knowledge and ideas have been established in your field.
 - Show what questions remain unanswered, not adequately answered, should be answered differently, have answers that are contentious.
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- Show what weaknesses exist in current literature.
- Show what ideas are controversial.
- Discuss what assumptions current ideas/theories rest on.
- Synthesize these ideas into what is known and what is unknown.
- Expose questions/issues that need more research
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- What is the author's question?
- What is the scope or significance of the work?
 - Is it clearly defined?
 - Is it adequate?
 - Should it be expanded?
 - Is it too general? That is, is the author's claim of importance applicable to more specialized cases?
- What methodology is the author using?
 - Is is quantitative, qualitative?
 - If quantitative, what statistical methods are applied?
 - What data or evidence is used?
 - Are these methods appropriate?
 - Is there room for improvement?
 - Are the results robust to the choice of methodology?

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- Does the article evaluate all the relevant literature?
 - Does the author include literature that doesn't agree with the results of this work?
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- Discuss an idea, an evolution of an understanding of an idea.
- Bring up literature as it relates to the idea.
- You need a reason for mentioning every reference. Keep in mind why you are bringing up each specific paper.
- Spend more time discussing the articles that are more closely related to your work. Spend less time with the articles less related to your work.
- Look around for not-yet published work, works in progress, working paper versions of currently published papers.
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- 1 Author
- 2 Title
- 3 If journal article: Journal, volume, issue, year, pages.
- 4 If book: Publisher, place, date, edition, relevant pages.
- 5 If working paper: source, date (day, month, year)
- 6 How and where you found it: what search engine, what website, library, etc.
- 7 Thesis statement: one sentence purpose of the paper.
- 8 Description of how this work contributes to your thesis.
- 9 Why would you cite this work? How does it fit in your literature review story?

- Follow the notes on the previous slide.
- Due next Thursday, July 31: at least 4 sources.
- Due Thursday, August 14 (Last day of class): at least 10 sources (including four from July 31).