



EBERLY WRITING STUDIO: WRITING THE LITERATURE REVIEW*

Types of Literature Reviews

Narrative: In an effort to cover a broad range of literature, these reviews synthesize a large body of works and are often written by senior members of a discipline.

Systematic: These reviews are more transparent regarding the criteria for including and excluding texts, so as to reduce author bias. Systematic reviews are most common in the health sciences.

Meta-Analysis: Meta-analyses combine and re-analyze data from previous studies to offer a more thorough understanding of a field of study than could be gained from investigating a single study.

Focused: These reviews are limited to a single aspect of previous research, such as research designs, methods, or approaches. In addition to describing one of these aspects, the focused review also discusses the implications of these choices.

Imposing Order on the Literature

Sources can be organized by:

- Publication date (chronology)
- Country of origin (provenance)
- Writer's discipline (e.g. Linguistics, Composition and Rhetoric, etc.)
- Writer's theoretical stance (Marxist, New Historicist, etc.)
- Type of publication (Book, journal article)

Sample Summary of Literature Table

Author	Date	Provenance	Field	Perspective	Genre
Carter	1999	US	Marxism	+	J. Article
Jones	2006	UK	New Historicism	-	Book
Williams	2010	US	Gender Studies	+	Book Chap.
Mitchell	2011	US	History	=	Book

Revealing the Organization of the LR to the Reader (Meta-discourse)

Meta-discourse should be used to alert readers to the organization of the LR and to highlight key aspects of the document. Here are three sample sentences containing commonly used meta-discourse:

Future Projects: In this section, I will present an overview of the most recent Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) scholarship.

Present Orientations: To be clear, I am in favor of revising NCLB rather than rejecting this initiative wholesale.

Recapitulations: The main purpose of this review has been to describe the early proponents of prison reform in the United States.

Citation Patterns

In addition to deciding *whether* to use direct quotations, summary, or paraphrasing, you should consider *how* you choose to cite a source. Consider the two options that follow:

Integral/Author Prominent: As Williams and Smith (1999) point out, remedial English courses are offered less frequently at four-year institutions than at community colleges.

Non-Integral/Research Prominent: Research suggests that remedial English courses are offered less frequently at four-year institutions than at community colleges (Williams & Smith, 1999).

As one might expect, integral citations emphasize individual authors and studies while non-integral citations emphasize the outcomes (research) of a given study or set of studies.

Criteria for Evaluating the LR

Coverage: Have clear reasons been given for the inclusion/exclusion of sources?

Synthesis: Has the topic been located within the broader scholarly literature?

Methodology: Have primary methodologies been evaluated for strengths and weaknesses?

Significance: Is the practical and scholarly significance of the research problem clear?

Rhetoric: Is there a transparent structure to the LR that is articulated through the use of meta-discourse?