

The Research Review

Research Project Course

Emily Towner

University of Cambridge



1. Introduction
2. Review Types
3. How To Write A Review

Introduction

What is a literature review?

- **Definition:** A analytic overview of research on a specific topic
- **Purpose:**
 - Summarizes what's already known
 - Identifies knowledge gaps or inconsistencies
 - Provides a groundwork for future research

Why write a review?

- Explaining complex topics:
 - Makes them easier to grasp for students, academics, policymakers or the public
- Exploring evolving ideas:
 - Shows how thinking on a topic has changed (usually the focus is on recent research)
- Identifying areas for future research:
 - Highlights unresolved questions

Review Types

Types of literature reviews

- **Systematic:**

- Highly structured and organized
- Focuses on data and analysis
- Often uses statistics or tables

- **Narrative:**

- Tells the “story” of the research
- Highlights key themes and debates
- May express the author’s interpretation of existing research
 - Note: This should still be grounded in empirical data (not opinion!)

Systematic reviews - pros and cons

- **Pros**

- More prescriptive
- Less prone to bias
- More thorough and quantitative

- **Cons**

- More time consuming
- Many more steps
 - Screening, quality assessment, data extraction
- Can involve complex meta analyses

Narrative reviews - pros and cons

- **Pros**
 - Can be completed more quickly
 - Can focus on a subset of the literature
 - More flexible
- **Cons**
 - More biased
 - Can be difficult to know where to start
 - Less prescriptive

What will we do in this course?

Due to time constraints, it's likely not possible to conduct a full systematic review in only 20 sessions. However, we can incorporate some of the prescriptive elements and bias reduction strategies to conduct a “modified” narrative review.

- I think this will be the best of both worlds!

How To Write A Review

How to write a (modified) narrative review

1. Choose a topic
2. Conduct background research
3. Identify a research question
4. Produce a review protocol
5. Conduct the literature search
6. Analyze the literature
7. Write the review
8. Edit and finalize the review

1. Choose a topic

- Choose a topic of interest
- This can be as broad or as narrow as you like
 - We will narrow this down later
- Examples:
 - Social media and mental health
 - Loneliness
 - Risk taking
 - Depression

2. Conduct background research

If you are new to a topic/field, it might be necessary to conduct some background research before defining your research question.

- Search a scholarly database for articles related to your topic
 - For example, Google Scholar
- Read and take notes on several articles
 - What interests you?
 - What perplexes you?
 - What are some research directions based on the articles you read?

3. Identify a research question

Now that you have read a few of the studies on your topic, you can now start to formulate the research topic into a more **specific** research question.

- Social media and mental health
 - What is the impact of social media on mental health among adolescents?
- Loneliness
 - How does loneliness impact our brains and behavior?
- Risk-taking
 - Is risk-taking heightened in adolescence?
- Depression
 - What is the most effective evidence-based treatment for depression?

4. Produce a review protocol (1/2)

We will have a workshop about this in Session 3, so I won't go into detail now. However, your review protocol will include all the information about how you will go about conducting your review:

- Working title
- Description and aims
- Research question
- Search strategy
- Screening
- Data synthesis

4. Produce a review protocol (2/2)

At this stage, you might need to make your research question even more narrow and specific.

- For example:
 - What is the most effective evidence-based treatment for depression?
 - What is the most effective evidence-based *psychotherapy* treatment for depression in *young adults*?

5. Conduct the literature search

- Use scholarly databases to compile 15-20 articles for your review
 - Google Scholar, Scopus, PsycInfo, Web of Science
 - Just using Google Scholar is totally okay!
- Use your review protocol to determine which articles you will include
- You might not have access to the full articles, this is okay. You can just read the abstracts for now and I can upload the articles for you in our shared resources.

6. Analyze the Literature

We will have a workshop about this in Session 2, so I won't go into detail now. However, your analysis of each article should answer the following questions:

- Why did they do the study (why does it matter)?
- What did they do?
- What did they find?
- What does it mean?

7. Write the review

We will have a discussion about this in Session 8, so I won't go into detail now. However, here are some initial guidelines:

- Start with an outline
 - This is especially important for narrative reviews as you have flexibility in how you structure the paper
- Include critical appraisal
 - Don't just summarize the results
 - You should discuss and evaluate the findings
 - There should be integration and synthesis
 - You can also identify gaps in the literature and suggests areas for further research

8. Edit and finalize the review

- I will provide two rounds of feedback on your research review
- It is completely normal for there to be many, many rounds of review and revision when working on scholarly papers
 - Do not be worried if there is a lot of “markup” on your writing!
- The goal is to incorporate the feedback before submitting the next draft.
- In addition to providing written comments/edits, we will also have discussions about the feedback.

THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?