# Unit 4: Reviewing the Literature

## Overview

In this unit, you will learn about developing your knowledge of the issue you have chosen to address and you will find out what others have learned about that issue. These steps will help you to refine your research plan and help you focus on the most likely solutions or interventions to the problem you are investigating.

### Topics

This unit is divided into the following topics:

1. The Purpose of a Literature Review in Action Research
2. The Importance of a Literature Review in Action Research

### Learning Outcomes

When you have completed this unit, you should be able to:

* Understand different ways for leaders to conduct a literature review.
* Synthesize key sources connecting them with the research question and topic area.
* Complete a literature review.

### Activity Checklist

Here is a checklist of learning activities you will benefit from in completing this unit. You may find it useful for planning your work.

**Activity 4.1:** Read Chapter 4: Engaging in Action Research by Parsons et al., review the Frederickson and Phelps text on writing literature reviews,

**Activity 4.2:** Explore the library research guide and tutorials.

**Activity 4.3: R**eflect on questions in your learning journal.

**Activity 4.4:** Read Chapter 7 and 8 of the Frederickson and Phelps text on writing literature reviews and watch a video.

**Activity 4.5:** Practice writing your literature review.

**Assessment:** Complete the discussion post and response and Complete Assignment #2: Leadership Challenge Literature Review.

### Resources

Here are the resources you will need to complete this unit.

* Parsons, J., Hewson, K., Adrian, L., & Day, N. (2013). Engaging in Action Research A Practical Guide to Teacher-Conducted Research for Educators and School Leaders. Brush Education Inc.
* Other online resources will be provided in the unit.

## Topic 1: The Purpose of a Literature Review in Action Research

Once your research area and focus have been identified, the next step is to contribute to your learning about the issue. The amount of time spent on this initial review will vary depending on the amount of information available and how specifically your issue can be defined. As you become more experienced in action research, you will learn that time spent on this activity is time well spent because it helps build your ability and commitment to lasting educational improvement at your site.

Developing your knowledge of the issue you have chosen to address and finding out what others have learned about that issue will help you to refine your research plan and help you focus on the most likely solutions or interventions.

Three strategies are useful in developing your background knowledge on your topic:

**Talking:** Seek knowledge anywhere you can find it. As you engage in action research conversations, consider who might have information about the issue you care about. You might begin your search individually, expand it within a group of colleagues and then consider who else might know something about your topic. Some university-based academics might also be interested in partnering with you as you engage in this work. It’s your project, but other researchers might be happy to become part of positive change. Don’t be afraid to ask.

**Learning:** Conferences, professional development activities and courses are excellent networking opportunities. Better yet, if you can create a presentation that outlines your action research project and shares your findings, tentative though they might be—whatever and wherever that project is at the time of the conference—such meetings with others are great opportunities to share ideas.

If you are an audience participant, these events can provide skills training and valuable materials to help you implement your action research intervention or strategy. Just as valuable, however, is the experience of being immersed in the topic and discussing the issues with others interested in the same topic.

Take advantage of these learning opportunities by talking and sharing with people who are new to your group. Opportunities often present themselves through guest presenters who speak at conferences. Often these presenters are academics with a wealth of research experience. Many of them would be willing to listen to fellow researchers who are working in a specific area. We have heard many stories of networking relationships that have had their genesis at conference when a courageous leader has engaged a presenter or keynote speaker with an action research question.

**Reading:** Accessing material is no longer the challenge it used to be. So much research is freely available, housed in online databases. A librarian or the library services at the university can help you design an efficient search for materials if you don’t know how.

Here are a few searchable resource databases that can offer and organize insights about your project. There are many TWU research tutorials on how to search academic databases. You can review the following videos [here](https://libguides.twu.ca/library_research/home) before engaging in your project research.

* [Business Source Complete (EBSCOhost)](https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=ip,uid&profile=ehost&defaultdb=bth) A significant source for articles in business, management, and leadership.
* [Academic Search Ultimate](https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=ip,uid&profile=ehost&defaultdb=asn) (EBSCOHost) A large, broad-based database covering many subjects.
* [JSTOR](https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=http://www.jstor.org/search) Multi-subject coverage of the most important journals, including those in leadership.
* [Harvard Business Publishing Collection](https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?profile=ehost&groupid=main&defaultdb=e076mww&authtype=ip,guest&custid=s6511865) (e-book database).
* [**Education Full Text**](https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=ip,uid&profile=ehost&defaultdb=eft) An education-focused database that contains the full text of 440+ journals.
* [**ERIC**](https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=ip,uid&profile=ehost&defaultdb=eric) A large education-focused database that contains many useful resources for teachers. Includes full text ERIC documents and some full text from journals provided by EBSCOhost.
* [**CBCA Complete**](https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/cbcacomplete) CBCA Complete is a multi-disciplinary database that includes information on Canadian education.

#### Learning Activity 4.1: Read Chapters on Completing a Literature Review

To begin this learning activity, read chapter 4: Completing a Literature Review in Engaging in Action Research by Parsons et al.

Next, revisit the open-source textbook [Literature Review for Nursing and Education Graduate Students](https://press.rebus.community/literaturereviewsedunursing/) from LDRS 591 to remind you about how to conduct a literature review. Specifically, chapters 6, 7, 8 which cover topics on finding and documenting sources.

#### Learning Activity 4.2: Explore the TWU library research guide and Review the Research Tutorials.

Next, explore the TWU library [Leadership Research Guide](https://libguides.twu.ca/leadership) to find sources on your topic.

Review any of the [research tutorials](https://libguides.twu.ca/library_research/home) provided at the TWU library to remind yourself how to search for academic sources.

#### Learning Activity 4.3: Reflect in Your Learning Journal

Finally, in your reflective learning journal, respond to the following questions:

* How do I read so that I will retain what I read?
* What is the best way I have discovered to take notes?
* What am I learning from doing my literature search?
* How will the knowledge I am gaining shape my action research?

*Note that the learning activities in this course are ungraded, unless specified. They are designed to help you succeed in your assessments in this course, so you are strongly encouraged to complete them.*

## Topic 2: The Importance of a Literature Review in Action Research

If you have gone through a process to discover an action research question that stimulates your interest and goals, one step would be to learn more about what is already known about the question you are asking. Reviewing the literature in the area you care about can be helpful.

Engaging in a literature review is a way of engaging in a conversation with others who care about, and who have already done work in, the same area you care about. By reading the research others have done, you can better understand your own action research question—especially if you talk with your colleagues about what you read. Here is an example:

*A business owner in a small town in rural BC noticed that her employees had a hard time returning to work after the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. She had hoped that her employees would return to work as soon as the business re-opened, but she found that her employees were not committing to taking shifts. The business owner wondered if she could do something to increase employee commitment and engagement. One idea that she had was to implement a new staff training program to re-set after the shutdown, but she didn’t know where to start. A colleague of hers recommended that she begin talking to other business owners to see what they were doing and the colleague also recommended that she read about best practices/strategies for employee engagement online.*

*The business owner began her search using terms such as “employee engagement”; “small business”; “best practices” and “strategies” and discovered that there was quite a bit of information on the topic. She felt encouraged and decided to start reading and planning her first employee training session.*

#### Learning Activity 4.4: Read and Watch a Video on Writing a Literature Review

The literature review defines the issue you are exploring more clearly by setting the problem within a wider professional context. At first, you will be exploring the literature. It is useful to determine if there are other authors who share your assumptions and if they have evidence you can use. You will be looking for how others have tackled the problem you are investigating. Their outcomes can be helpful to you.

When you begin writing, think about how to structure the evidence. This should NOT be a randomly organized collection of findings from a first, second and third article. Create a set of sections that flow logically, building the case for your approach. Your literature review can be a few pages or it can be an extensive chapter depending on your question, context, and requirements.

To begin this learning activityrevisit the open-source textbook [Literature Review for Nursing and Education Graduate Students](https://press.rebus.community/literaturereviewsedunursing/) from LDRS 591 to remind you about how to conduct a literature review. Specifically, chapters 7 and 8 cover topics on synthesizing sources and writing your literature review.

Next, watch the following video “[Literature Review Preparation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nX2R9FzYhT0&feature=youtu.be)” by Laura Killam. This video shows you exactly how to create a summary table for your research articles. It outlines what information should go in the table and provides helpful summary hints.

#### Learning Activity 4.5: Practice Writing a Literature Review

**Part 1: Start writing.** Begin by writing a rough draft of the nature of the problem you are addressing. This will be a high-level summary of your opening paragraph of your literature review where you describe the problem to your reader. Here’s an example of an action research literature review introduction (see link \*to be provided\*).

**Part 2: Create reviews of your articles/sources.** The article review template can be helpful when organizing your notes as you read the research on your topic. When you create an article review, make sure it is no longer than one page. Every review should consist of the following sections. Write your notes in complete sentences.

**1. Citation:** Write the citation should be in proper APA form.

**2. Article Summary:** The article summary should be about one paragraph and should review the article by answering the following questions. Write about one sentence for each question.

* What was the researchers’ interest?
* How did they conduct their research?
* Who were the participants?

**3. What?** The “What?” section should list three to five points that you believe should be

remembered. These are your choices, and could differ from person to person. They do not

have to cover the entire article; focus on what you care about.

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

**4. So What?** The “So what?” section should be a personal reflection of where the article fits into

your own thinking. It should be used to connect what you have read with what you think.

**5. Now What?** The “Now what?” section should be a first-draft plan of where the article (and

your bridging of this article with your own thinking) takes you next. What do you think you

should/might do in response to how the article helps move your thinking forward?

Here’s an example of an [article review](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hHRsa6bAnZVxfQtF6pV03-dcfzPaUyBRWzgVffbHaAo/edit?usp=sharing).

**Part 3: Next, you need synthesize what others have said.** After you have completed your article reviews, then you need to organize the literature into themes, dimensions, or narratives that come from what others have written.In this section you get authors to “talk” to each other.

Most paragraphs in a literature review follow a very simple and redundant format. It starts by naming the author(s) and year of publication. Then it gives a short summary of the article. Then it gives the points you want to make about the article that YOU think are important. Here’s an example of a [synthesized information](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hHRsa6bAnZVxfQtF6pV03-dcfzPaUyBRWzgVffbHaAo/edit?usp=sharing).

**Part 4: Summary:** Share what you have learned about the context of the problem. This is similar to the rich description, but it is a description of the research context taken as a whole. You will end this section with your overall action research question. Here’s an example of [a summary and a template](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hHRsa6bAnZVxfQtF6pV03-dcfzPaUyBRWzgVffbHaAo/edit?usp=sharing) that you can use.

***Note that this learning activity will be assessed in Assignment 2: Literature Review at the end of this unit.***

## Unit 4 Summary

In this unit, you have had the opportunity to learn about searching for literature on your topic and you have spent time finding out what others have learned about that issue. You have engaged in practical steps to write your literature review and have reflected on what you have learned about your topic.

## Assessment

### Discussion Post and Response:

After completing this unit, including the learning activities, you are asked to share some information from your literature search and summaries in a discussion post for your colleagues.

* Select two articles from your own article summaries and write a paragraph explaining how and why the sources relate to each other and your review of the literature.
* Post your reflection in the Unit 4 Discussion Forum and respond to 2-3 other posts.

**Grading Rubric**

| **Criteria** | **Excellent** | **Good** | **Fair** | **Unacceptable** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Reasoning** | Arguments or positions are reasonable and supported with evidence from the readings. Often deepens the conversation by going beyond the text, recognizing implications and extensions of the text. Provides analysis of complex ideas that help deepen the inquiry and further the conversation. | Arguments or positions are reasonable and mostly supported by evidence from the readings. In general, the comments and ideas contribute to the group’s understanding of the material and concepts. | Contributions to the discussion are more often based on opinion or unclear views than on reasoned arguments or positions based on the readings. Comments or questions suggest a difficulty in following complex lines of argument or student’s arguments are convoluted and difficult to follow. | Comments are frequently so illogical or without substantiation that others are unable to critique or even follow them. Rather than critique the text the student may resort to ad hominem attacks on the author instead. |
| **Reading** | Student has carefully read and understood the readings as evidenced by oral contributions; familiarity with main ideas, supporting evidence and secondary points. Comes to class prepared with questions and critiques of the readings. | Student has read and understood the readings as evidenced by oral contributions. The work demonstrates a grasp of the main ideas and evidence but sometimes interpretations are questionable. Comes prepared with questions. | Student has read the material, but comments often indicate that he/she didn’t read or think carefully about it, or misunderstood or forgot many points. Class conduct suggests inconsistent commitment to preparation. | Student either is unable to adequately understand and interpret the material or has frequently come to class unprepared, as indicated by serious errors or an inability to answer basic questions or contribute to discussion. |

## Complete Assignment #2: Leadership Challenge Literature Review

Professionals are inundated with problems that require current information, new understandings, and workplace skills for the development and implementation of solutions.

For this assignment, begin by describing a leadership problem of practice you are currently facing, or expect to face in the future, either personally or professionally. Explain why solving this problem is important. Identify a concern that YOU can do something about, in relation to your own leadership practice.

1. What do you care about and how do you intend to grow as a leader while you investigate this problem? (i.e., identify a competency to grow in).

1. Clearly indicate how growth in this competency relates to your leadership problem.
2. What is the expected outcome and why this outcome is important for your leadership development?

2. If you were to study this topic or issue, what specific question would you want to answer?

Next, conduct a literature review on the leadership problem that you are investigating. The purpose of a literature review is to offer an **overview of existing literature on a specific topic**. Your task is to summarize what is already available about a certain topic and then draw conclusions about that topic. To make gathering your research easier, be sure to start with a narrow/specific topic and then widen your topic if necessary. Use the following steps to help guide you (Parsons, 2013, p. 43):

* Conduct a search on the Internet using key terms.
* Ask others for suggestions of key researchers and literature (you could consult leaders in professional development for direction).
* Generate a collection of 25 to 30 articles to review.
* Read these articles and take notes.
* Organize the notes into an outline.
* Use the outline to write the literature review.

When you are writing the literature review, keep the following questions in mind:

* What information will you need to provide a broad context for your topic?
* Why is it important to address this problem?
* What best practices you have discovered?
* What best practices do you think might help you address your leadership problem?
* What key terms should you define so that the reader understands your topic?
* What is the purpose of your paper?

**Literature Review Assignment Rubric:**

| **Criteria** | **Outstanding** | **Acceptable** | **Inadequate/Missing** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Introduction** | All elements of the introduction are explained and discussed in a clear, interesting, concise way, and include relevant, rich, carefully selected details. A clear case is made for why the focus of the study is important to the field and of interest to the author. Key terms are clearly defined in the context of this investigation. At least 10 high quality articles are used. The process for conducting the review is described. The reader has a clear understanding of what to expect in the rest of the paper. | All elements of the introduction are understandable, although the description may be broad or simplistic; the supporting details may be somewhat insubstantial or not carefully selected; or some of the discussion may be off-topic. The importance of the topic to the field and to the author is clear. Key terms are identified although the specific meanings for each may not be fully clarified. At least 10 mostly high quality articles are used. The process for conducting the review is described. The structure of the rest of the paper is somewhat clear. | Elements of the introduction are not clearly described or are insufficiently developed; the study is descriptive of a single feature or the study lacks a main focus; the explanation or description is rambling; details are unconnected. The importance of the topic is unclear. Fewer than 10 high quality articles are used. The process for conducting the review is not well described. There is little to no indication of what the rest of the paper will be about. |
| **Review of the Literature** | All themes related to research question are relevant and developed. All discussion is clearly written, in an interesting, concise way, with relevant and rich yet carefully selected detail. Direct quotations are very carefully selected. Findings from various articles and authors are synthesized within each theme, and within subsections for each theme. Multiple perspectives, contradictory evidence, or alternative interpretations are discussed. | Two themes related to the research question or problem statement are developed. All discussion is understandable, although it may be too broad or simplistic in places; the supporting details may be somewhat insubstantial or not carefully selected; or some of the discussion may be off-topic. Direct quotations are used but may be a bit overused. The connection of most elements to the research question is evident. Findings from various articles and/or authors are tied together, although more in a list form than well synthesized around sub-themes. | Only one theme related to the research question is developed. Elements of the literature review are not clearly described or are insufficiently developed; there are no clear themes; the discussion is rambling or details are unconnected. Direct quotations are substantially overused. It is difficult to discern the connection between some of the discussion and the research focus. Not enough evidence supports findings. The review is more like an annotated bibliography than a synthesis around dominant themes. |
| **Conclusions and Recommendations** | All discussion is clearly written, in an interesting, concise way, with relevant and rich yet carefully selected detail. The connection back to the initial ideas about the research question is taken to a new place, based upon the research. Recommendations for needed research are logically related to the identified gaps; methodological considerations may also be addressed. | All discussion is understandable, although it may be too broad or simplistic in places; the supporting details may be somewhat insubstantial or not carefully selected; or some of the discussion may be off-topic. There is a clear connection back to the initial ideas about the research question. Gaps in the literature are clearly presented. Recommendations for filling the gaps are stated. | Elements are not clearly discussed or are insufficiently developed; the discussion is rambling or details are unconnected; there is no connection back to the initial ideas about the research question or problem. There are no recommendations provided. Implications for future research are underdeveloped or not discussed. |
| **General Writing Style and Presentation** | Adheres to the page limit criteria. There are no grammatical/spelling/syntax errors. The paper is clearly organized using headings, and the readability of is excellent. | Adheres to the page limit criteria. There are minimal grammatical/spelling/sytanx errors. The paper is organized with headings and the readability of the paper is good. | Does not meet page limit criteria. There are many grammatical/spelling/syntax errors. The paper is not organized well and the readability of the paper is poor. |
| **APA Formatting** | All articles cited in the text are included in the reference list. There are no APA formatting mistakes (see the APA style checklist). | All articles cited in the text are included in the reference list. Only minor or few APA formatting mistakes (see the APA style checklist). Headings follow APA style and are helpful to the reader. | Includes articles not cited in the text or excludes articles cited in the text. Many APA formatting mistakes. There are no headings to guide the reader, or header structure is confusing. |

## Checking your Learning

Before you move on to the next unit, you may want to check to make sure that you are able to:

* Understand different ways for leaders to conduct a literature review.
* Synthesize key sources connecting them with the research question and topic area.
* Complete a literature review.