Literature Consultation

A literature consultation is a methodical review of applicable publications (i.e., books, research articles, relevant blog posts, usability evaluations and gray literature such as conference abstracts or private sector reports) on a selected topic. The resulting report evaluates and summarizes available published data (including gaps) as a basis for future investigation. Frequently, this is utilized as a preparatory activity, done in advance of other work such that study materials can incorporate that knowledge into planning and build from it. However, it can also be employed as an independent study or there may be occasions where duplication of previously published work has benefits to VHA.

A formal literature review (or systemic review) is an established academic process that can take months, and involve complicated algorithms (such as inclusion and exclusion criteria), and require multiple reviewers to reach a defined level of assurance that the review was comprehensive and there is complete confidence in the knowledge base.

 HFE has adopted the literature consultation method to condense into a shorter time period (from 2 weeks to a month), with less rigorous search and documentation requirements.

An HFE literature consultation is **not** an informal search, annotated bibliography or collection of summaries of reviewed materials. It is an organized and structured approach to exploring available knowledge (to include gray literature) on a topic of interest. The consultation starts with a defined focus question(s), objective, or narrow topic of interest. It is conducted with formal and documented rules for searching, including criteria defining which materials will be reviewed in more detail. Finally, it is reported with a summary of the structure of the review, critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the reviewed publications (Literature Review Tutorial, 2015), and, if found, a summary of the answer to the original question or objective.

**Benefits**

* Compiles the work already done on a topic;
* Identifies what is known and not known on a topic;
* Helps define focus questions and study objectives;
* Does not require participants;
* Can be completed by one person; and,
* Can provide a broad view of a topic

**Limitation**

* Time intensive, if strictly observed;
* When surveying the literature, there is often a lag of up to three years between the conclusion of work and its publication, so there is risk of duplicating work in progress;
* It can be difficult to ascertain reliability: research publications often have strict publication standards, but blogs (common in the UX community) are not commonly accepted as valid sources;
* Can be challenging to interpret whether academic, expert and public sector findings are applicable to VHA populations;
* The best results require access to libraries and/or databases for many of the journal articles; and,

      May require a lot of time for a search with few to no results.

**Outcomes**

Reporting begins with a description of the exact method used. Restate the objectives and focus question (s). Document and describe the methods used including:

         The exact format of search terms (i.e., “’Search Terms’” vs “search terms”);

         Criteria/Filters applied in the search (i.e. how many years back the search went; type of publisher);

         Databases searched;

         Search sites used (i.e., Google, VACO Library, PubMed, Google Scholar);

         Number of search results for each search;

                         o   Number of abstracts reviewed; and,

                         o   Number of articles read in full and analyzed.

The remainder of the report should be discursive rather than summative. (Taylor, n.d.) That is, it should not summarize the data found, but rather synthesize and critically analyze it for an overall or even new viewpoint on the focus question or topic. It may be appropriate to parse the analysis into findings. If that is the case, a severity ranking should be assigned to each finding. These rankings can be determined by the impact of the problem and the persistence of the problem.

**Study Execution**

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| **​Milestone** | **​Owner** |
| ​Determine focus question(s)/study objective | |  | | --- | | HFE and Business Office | |
| Test, determine and document search terms and scope | ​                   HFE |
| Communicate with VA librarian on needs/Review process for accessing databases and libraries | HFE |
| Search for articles (if not using librarian provided search results) or other published materials; track search and results | HFE |
| Review abstracts of search results and determine relevant articles | ​                   HFE |
| Read and analyze resulting articles and published materials | ​                   HFE |
| Report on analysis of readings | HFE |
| ​[**Conduct After Action Review**](https://vaww.portal2.va.gov/sites/humanfactors/SitePages/AAR%20Process.aspx) | HFE |

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| **Phase of Development​** | |
| ​ | ​Planning, Scoping & Definition |
| ​ | ​Requirements Gathering |
| **✔** | **​Early Design** |

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| **​Study Characteristics ​** | |
| ​**Timeframe** | ​2-4 weeks |

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| **​Related Methods ​** | |
| **Derived from** | ​Academic Literature Review |
| **​Complimentary Methods** | NA |
| **​Similar Methods** | NA |
| **​Follow-Up** | Formative or Summative Usability Study (if needed |

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| **​References** |
| *Literature Review Tutorial*. (2015, August 23). Retrieved from CQUniversity Library: [**http://libguides.library.cqu.edu.au/litreview**](http://libguides.library.cqu.edu.au/litreview) |
| Taylor, D. (n.d.). *The Literature Review: A Few Tips on Conducting it*. (University of Toronto) Retrieved October 18, 2016, from [**http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review**](http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review) |