

Literature Review

ASSIGNMENT: Developing your literature review using a synthesis matrix

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will learn what a synthesis matrix is.
- Students will use a synthesis matrix to organize their literature review.

BACKGROUND

Writing a literature review can be a cumbersome task. It's often a difficult and time-consuming undertaking. But what is a literature review anyway? A literature review is a summary of the current state-of-the-art knowledge about an issue. It answers the questions, what do we know or do not know about an issue? It's important to examine different sources to determine where the knowledge overlaps and where it falls short. To do so requires a synthesis of the various related subtopics in order to develop a greater understanding of the state of knowledge on a larger issue.

For example, one section of a literature review might read "Researcher A suggests that X is true. Researcher B also argues that X is true, but points out that the effects of X may be different from those suggested by Researcher A." It is clear that subtopic X is the main idea covered in these sentences. Researchers A and B agree that X is true, but they disagree on X's effects. There is both agreement and disagreement, but what links the two arguments is the fact that they both concern X¹.

A synthesis matrix can be used to help organize your sources of information, presenting it as a chart that allows a researcher to sort and categorize the different arguments presented on an issue. While there is no particularly strict format for a synthesis matrix, we will be using the following format.

Sources	Research question/hypothesis	Methods	Findings	Strengths	Limitations
<i>Where is the current work located?</i> Reference to source. Must	<i>What issue is the paper addressing?</i> The research question that the paper sets out to	<i>How was it performed?</i> What approaches, methods,	<i>What did they find?</i> Describes the data that was collected and the results of	<i>What was particularly good about the paper?</i> This section typically highlights	<i>What were the shortcomings of the current work?</i>

¹ https://case.fiu.edu/writingcenter/online-resources/_assets/synthesis-matrix-2.pdf

use a consistent citation format.	answer, or a hypothesis that the authors set out to support or disprove.	tools and techniques were used?	any statistical tests/analysis that were performed.	the major contribution about the current work.	What could be done to improve the current work.
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TASK

Using the above synthesis matrix template, summarize 3 recent important works that relate to your project. Have this document ready for next class and be prepared to discuss the following questions:

- Did you notice any similar patterns among those papers summarized?
- How difficult was it to use this template to organize your work?
- In your view, what are some of the benefits and limitations of using this above template to summarize your work?
- Any suggestions that you may have to further help your classmates with writing their literature review.