

Independent Project-Stage 2

Requirements

- Literature Review—see below
- Due Date: 03/28/2016 at 1pm through Blackboard
- Time Commitment: expect to spend up to 8–12 hours on this phase over the next month. Start early!
- Word Count: 750-1000 words divided fairly equally between the sections described below.
- Citations and bibliography required.

Introduction

You have decided on a question. You have identified some articles and books that seem relevant to your question (though you have yet to read them in much detail). Now what? How do you use these resources to find your answer? Do you need to read them in detail? Do you need to summarize each in detail? No! That's way too much work. Look at the bibliography at the end of any scholarly paper or the back of any book. The bibliography likely amounts to hundreds if not thousands of pages of work. But the author didn't write in detail about all of this work. What gives?

The purpose of this assignment is to teach you what to do with all the material you have collected. What's it for? What should you include? How much work do you really have to do on it all? That means—literature review time!

What is a literature review?

Let's start with an analogy. You've been asked to design a website to help renters find homes in Jersey City. To make it easier for renters, you've been asked to identify some criteria that would allow them narrow their searches. What should these search criteria be? In order to answer this question, you need to read several different rental adverts. What are the common types of information that comes up? Obviously, price, location, size, square footage, etc. But what about a dishwasher? What about the color of the walls, carpet type,

proximity to cinemas? Users of the website will be overwhelmed by too many criteria, so you need to decide what's most useful for them.

Writing a literature review is similar in two ways:

1. Your job in writing a literature review is to identify relevant similarities and dissimilarities in the various resources that seem to address your topic. You will regularly find that different parts of the literature take opposing sides on your question. Here we have an important trend that you want to mention. You will also find common or dominant reasons for various answers. Again, this is something you want to note and write about.
2. The person developing the website doesn't tell you the best house to live in. They group together the most important features that renters might look for. Similarly, literature reviews don't take a stand on the issues. They try to present the various dominant/common views about an issue as neutrally as possible.

What about all the nitty gritty details? Do you have to write in length about them? Probably not. Suppose you would like to know why students pick one university over another. You conduct an interview of 1000 students. You may find that cost, reputation, location, etc., are common responses. Let us also imagine that you collect detailed information about each student, about how much they can afford, their price tolerance, etc. Do you need to include these details of the 1000 students into your study? Of course not! Your job is to extrapolate from the details and report what's common.

Does that mean that no detail is required? No. Literature reviews often include a discussion of some representative resource. Think of our previous example. Suppose you discover that students weigh the cost of their education heavily when deciding what school to attend. Don't tell me about each of the 1000 students. But it helps to talk in detail about one or two students who really illustrate the general discovery that you have made.

Similarly, literature reviews will both explain some of the current, common views about a topic *and* discuss a couple of resources to illustrate these common features/trends.

The Process—Don't submit this part!

Here are some general approaches to writing a literature review. Best practice may vary by discipline:

1. Create an annotation for each item in your bibliography. Don't worry about reading the item in full. Often reading abstracts, introductions, and conclusions will suffice. Skim a relevant chapter in a book, not the whole book. Your goal is to identify the relevance it has to your main question.

2. Write a couple of sentences stating how your source answers your question. Write another couple of sentences outlining the main reason for its answer. Note some interesting details and examples. One or two nice quotes is also helpful. Keep account of the page numbers.
3. Look at your annotations. Identify themes and common claims. Group the items into different categories. For instance, you might notice that there are two diverging answers to your question. You might also notice that there are some agreements on why to answer the question one way rather than the other.
4. Write down the common themes, arguments, you see in your annotations. Try describe these commonalities as clearly as possible.
5. Choose some representative works, e.g., maybe there is a particularly strong article that argues for one answer and a different one that argues for a different answer.
6. Read your representative works in detail. Take detailed notes as you do so.

Writing the Literature Review—Do Submit this Part!

The structure of literatures review will vary by disciplines and questions. However, since the main goal of this exercise is to teach you how to do research, I want you to write the following three sections. The first raises a question. The second offers one answer. The third offers a different answer. Both the second and third sections outline the reasons for their respective answers and include some details from a representative resource defending that answer.

This structure is artificial. Many questions admit of more than two answers. Many similar answers have subtle differences. That's ok! If you can identify and explain two different mains answers to your question, then you will have learned the skill this assignment is designed to teach.

Section 1: Context

Suppose you pick up a paper and it begins 'Students choose college based on either cost alone or reputation alone.' That's a bit abrupt. The author does not explain why it's important to identify why students pick college over another, nor do they explain why anyone would be interested in reading about the issue. Now consider this opening:

New Jersey's high schools are full and getting fuller. We are graduating more and more of these students too. Not only that, more and more of our graduates are going on to attend college. So, New Jersey seems to be doing well by its young folk. Unfortunately, though, this

good news is tempered by a worrying trend. Fewer and fewer of our students are attending college in New Jersey itself. Our young people are leaving in great numbers to attend colleges and universities in other states. This bodes poorly for the future. It's unclear that they will return to benefit the state they left. Why is this happening? Why are young people choosing to attend college out of state? There are two opposing views. One group of researchers argue that cost alone is the culprit. They claim that our young people are leaving because colleges and universities in other states are cheaper. Not everyone agrees. A different group of researchers blame the exodus on students' belief in the respective qualities of in-state and out of state colleges. The researchers offer very different remedies to the proposal. If the former is correct, then we should focus on lowering tuition in the Garden State. If the latter is correct, we need to do a better job at marketing the strengths and successes of our state institutions.

Notice that this introduction does three things. First, it establishes a shared context, i.e., it informs the reader about some phenomenon. Second, it raises a question or problem about the phenomenon. Third, it clearly states the answer and explains the answer's importance.

Your literature review needs to begin in this way too. Provide some context. Write a paragraph or two. Raise a problem. State two different solutions. Explain the importance of the problem and solutions.

Section 2: Answer 1

Here you will explain one way your question is answered in the literature. Your job here is to summarize the answer given and also the main reasons offered for that answer. You will also write a few paragraphs summarizing some details from a representative work that takes this line.

Section 3: Answer 2

Here you will explain a different way that your question is answered in the literature. Your job here is to summarize the answer given and also the main reasons offered for that answer. You will also write a couple of paragraphs summarizing some details from a representative work that takes this line.