LITERATURE REVIEWS 101

HOW TO WRITE A COMPELLING AND “A”-WORTHY LITERATURE REVIEW
SKILLS IN PLANNING: WRITING LITERATURE REVIEWS

Skills in Planning: Writing Literature Reviews

Saturday, December 20, 2008 - 7:34pm PST by ANN FORSYTH

Terrorized by the literature is the title of a chapter of Howard Becker's excellent book, *Writing for Social Scientists* (1986, Chicago). Whether through terror or misunderstanding, the literature review is one of the areas that students in planning find most confusing. While I have dealt with the literature review briefly in my blog on writing proposals, the tips below provide more detailed advice on how to compose a literature review and how to find important literature in the age of information overload.

What a Literature Review Is

A literature review is a review of works on a subject. It is an important step in research and in many projects. It tells a story summarizing the themes and findings of works in an area, critically assessing their quality, drawing out their implications for one's own research or project questions, and identifying gaps or areas for future work. A literature review is typically one section of a research proposal. In a final report or paper, however, it may be in a single chapter or part but it also may be sprinkled throughout where it is relevant. A literature review is not:
WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?

• Evaluation
• Synthesis

WHAT A LITERATURE REVIEW IS NOT

• Summary
PURPOSE OF A LITERATURE REVIEW?

• identify policies/tools to achieve specific outcomes
• justify your research
• identify key issues you need to assess in your research
• learn about methods
• historical context of research
DOCUMENTS TO INCLUDE?

• analytical/research-oriented
• academic journal articles
• research reports
• published literature reviews (JPL)
• NOT primary documents
• can’t find directly related articles? look to a related field
LITERATURE REVIEW ASSIGNMENT

- 6 clearly identified sections
  - Introduction
  - Main themes -- present your evaluation & synthesis of the literature, more on this later
  - Conclusion
  - Annotated bibliography (carefully follow instructions) -- 30 different sources, 15 peer-reviewed
  - Appendix A
  - Appendix B
## APPENDIX B: SUMMARY TABLE

Table 1 What methods of community outreach engage youth (Theme 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
<th>Key Limitations/Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smith 2011</td>
<td>Focus group with 29 teens in Chicago</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko &amp; Liu 2008</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>Parents think their kids will like game-based exercises and interviewing their neighbors</td>
<td>Do parents really know what will engage kids?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Add additional columns for issues you want to systematically analyze -- e.g. variables included
“Note” with “Bibliography”

“In-text parenthetical reference” with “Reference List”

Things to Note (key differences from note):
- “Hanging” indent (1st line flush, remaining indented)
- 1st author’s name ordered last then first, remaining in regular order
- Full range of page numbers for article
- Punctuation: periods instead of commas after all authors’ names and article title
- If no issue #, leave out... , no. 6 INSTEAD... 49 (2006):

- If only two authors... Hilary Nixon and Raul Lejano, “... for note
- AND... Nixon, Hilary, and Raul Lejano. “... for bibliography
- Online help (not a substitute for book) [http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html)
Table 1. Information relevant to my 298 report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column heading (left)</th>
<th>Column heading (centered)</th>
<th>Column heading (centered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Data&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data (adapted) from Nixon 2009.
Note. Information that applies to entire table.
<sup>a</sup>This information only applies to this data entry.
Figure 1. Darwin at Santa Clara University. Photograph by Katrine Davis.
EVALUATE & SYNTHESIZE??

• show patterns, themes, consistencies and inconsistencies across all of the sources

• what we know --> ability to explain how your research fits

• not enough to say...
  • author x says y, author a says b
  • instead... discuss whether y and b are similar/difference and explain any differences
MAKING AN ARGUMENT?

Two components:

1. point / statement
2. reason / evidence
IN-CLASS ACTIVITY #1

Read Examples 1 & 2 from handout (and assignment guidelines)

Where does each example…

A. Explain the key conclusion(s) one draws from all the studies taken as a group?

B. Describe similarities and differences between the different studies’ findings?

C. Explain how methodological or other issues may explain differences among the studies’ findings?

D. Explain if/when/where the findings from this group of studies are likely to be generalizable?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Findings on age</th>
<th>Study limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McDonald &amp; Oates, ‘03</td>
<td>Pilot program; UK; postcard survey</td>
<td>negative correlation between age &amp; recycling</td>
<td>Conducted during rainy winter and bins were located outside in non-covered area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meneses &amp; Palacio, ‘05</td>
<td>In-person surveys</td>
<td>no relationship</td>
<td>Only interviewed single-family households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Valle et al., ‘04</td>
<td>Stratified random sample, phone surveys; Portugal</td>
<td>Positive correlation between age &amp; recycling</td>
<td>Only conducted bivariate analysis, multivariate analysis would produce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbott et al., ‘11</td>
<td>Online survey; UK</td>
<td>Older residents more likely to recycle</td>
<td>Sample underrepresented older adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferrara et al., ‘05</td>
<td>Structured interviews, 12 cities in Ontario, Canada;</td>
<td>Negative correlation in communities with mandatory recycling, positive correlation in communities with voluntary recycling</td>
<td>Small sample size (358)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five recent studies reported on the relationship between age and recycling. Overall, the results are ambiguous as to both the existence and direction of the relationship. Two studies report a positive relationship between age and recycling although McDon and O suggest that a negative correlation exists. In a study by M, & P., no statistically significant relationship was found. Surprisingly, Ferrara et al. discovered that the relationship varied depending on whether the recycling program was voluntary or mandatory.
YOUR TURN

Is Recycling Behavior Influenced by Gender? -- draft a short paragraph that evaluates and synthesizes your findings on this topic.

1. What is the general / overall finding? How many studies?
2. Explanation for the finding? (Think about your own household recycling behavior)
3. Exception(s) to the overall finding?
4. Explanation for the exception? (Be creative)
Finding from research on the relationship between gender and recycling are clear. Four of the five studies reviewed found no significant difference between men and women; both genders are equally likely to recycle. Only one study found that women were more likely to recycle than men. This study’s sample size was quite small, which may be a key cause of the unusual finding on gender. Although many studies suggest that women are more likely than men to engage in other types of pro-environmental behavior, recycling is typically considered a household activity, so the gender of the recycler may differ by day.
DEADLINES

• Draft literature review due October 26
  • No “grade” but comments on key elements
  • Only focus on 1 theme
• Final literature review due November 23
  • Must receive a “B” to pass