



REVIEW/CRITIQUE OF THE LITERATURE

A Critique of the literature is not an independent summary of each article!

1. Identify your research question as precisely as possible

- write it down
- be prepared to revise it as you proceed
- organize the sources with respect to the answers they suggest to your research question

2. Preparation - for each source:

- Identify the source completely
- Identify the main conclusion(s)
- Identify the nature of the support for the conclusion(s)
 - if theoretical support: identify the main argument(s)
 - if empirical support:
 - how was it collected?
 - what is the research design used?
 - how was the data analyzed?
 - what are the main findings?

NOTE: be careful to distinguish between the findings of the research and the interpretations of those findings!

- Identify the validity and reliability of the conclusions
 - identify any logical problems
 - identify any research design problems
 - identify any data analysis problems
 - identify any problems of interpretation

3. Organization of the review/critique

- Sort the sources with respect to your research question.
 - identify the answers suggested as part of the conclusions of the research
 - identify the answers suggested as part of the arguments within the research
 - identify the variety of answers provided
- sort the sources with respect to the strength of the case presented for your claim
- organize the sources with respect to your argument
 - eg. if your argument entails a number of claims, some sources may address only one of these claims
- search for
 - claims which are strongly supported
 - claims which are not strongly supported
- Use the strongly supported claims to support your argument
- Use the not strongly supported claims as a basis for your research.

Read these Journal Articles for Examples of Literature Reviews

Fisher, A.D.

1987 "Alcoholism and race: the misapplication of both concepts to North American Indians." Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 24:1(Feb)81-98.

Organizes discussion in terms of concepts discussed in the literature ("alcoholism" and "race"), specific studies (Fenna, Reed), and study methodology (heritability, twins, adoption, and family history).

Lenton, Rhonda

1990 "Techniques of child discipline and abuse by parents." CRSA 27:2(May)156-185.

Organizes discussion in terms of several different aspects: reasons for the research (practical, substantive, and theoretical), 4 theories of child abuse, and methodological considerations. Provides critique while she discusses literature.

Pirie, Marion

1988 "Women and the illness role: rethinking feminist theory." CRSA 25:4(Nov)629-648.

Theoretical essay: literature review and critique. Develops theoretical modification from the review.

Pratt, Geraldine

1987 "Class, home, and politics." CRSA 24:1(Feb)39-57.

Makes distinctions in the theoretical literature: "incorporation" theorists vs. "pluralists" (i.e. organizes the literature in terms of these two approaches), provides critique, then uses the critique as a basis for the research.