

## **CHDV 242/Fall, 2010**

### **Literature Review**

The final project for the class is a 12-15 page literature review. An initial topic for your review is due on October 5<sup>th</sup>. An outline of your review and a list of references is due on October 26<sup>th</sup> and an early (not rough) draft of the literature review (optional, but encouraged) is due for instructor review by November 16<sup>th</sup>. The final Literature review is due by December 14<sup>th</sup> (finals week).

A literature review is a document that reviews, synthesizes, and evaluates important literature on a topic of scholarly study. It is used to make an argument for something - a research question or project idea, professional recommendation(s), and/or suggested topics for future research. It is NOT a simply a summary of articles, but represents a “new take” on the information, stating conclusions about a body of research.

The literature review is not typically exhaustive. Instead, it is a review of representative literature in a topic area. Generally, you will read more articles on your topic than you cite in your literature review. The idea is to immerse oneself in the literature on a topic, and write a review of literature that *represents* that topic. Typically, this means between 12-15 citations.

A good literature review includes thoughtful evaluation of the research. This can mean noting comparisons, inconsistencies, or contradictions in theoretical assumptions, conclusions or methodology, and can include both strengths and limitations of studies. It often involves making suggestions for future research on the topic based on the literature you review.

### ***Steps in Conducting and Writing your Review***

#### **1) SELECT A TOPIC/ CONDUCT AN INITIAL DATABASE SEARCH**

Choosing a topic is an important part of the literature review process. Select a topic that is:

- (a) neither too broad nor too narrow
- (b) interesting to you
- (c) of current research interest
- (d) well-researched in the discipline

Do a preliminary library search to narrow/focus your topic. For example, instead of “attachment” or even “adolescent attachment”, find something specific about attachment to investigate, e.g., “adolescent attachment and romantic relationships”. A review of abstracts of articles found in the initial search will likely help in this process. Don’t get too attached to a topic until you’ve seen what has been done. You may want to consider several topics as you do this first search.

#### **2) COLLECT ARTICLES**

Based on subsequent library searches, collect articles based on your refined topic. In general, you will read more widely than you cite in the review. Read relatively broadly, then choose representative articles directly related to your topic to include in the review. Although you will want to focus primarily on recent, empirical research from peer-review journals, you might also want to look at previous reviews, older articles that researchers in the field tend to cite (that represent a turning point in the field, for example). Consider also influential theoretical articles on the topic.

#### **3) READ ARTICLES**

Scan articles at first, then re-read deeply and actively. Write notes for each article (developing an annotated bibliography is useful, especially for longer reviews). Group articles by theme or idea within the topic. These themes will help create a structure for your paper. Be sure to allow enough time for this process!

#### **4) WRITE THE REVIEW**

Among your collected articles, choose approximately 12-15 that you will use in your review. Use only those articles that directly address your topic. Develop at least a rough outline of the topics/themes you will cover in your paper before beginning to write.

##### ***Structure of the review***

The biggest challenge in writing a literature review is creating an organized structure. Headings and subheadings can help to organize your paper and provide important structure for the reader.

Begin the review with an introduction telling the reader the purpose and scope of the review, as well as how the review will be organized. Next, describe the theoretical framework or frameworks that guide the research you will review. Then group research studies and other types of literature by theme or assertion and summarize research studies around these themes/assertions, keeping in mind that *space denotes importance*, and providing evaluation as you go. Your conclusion should include a summary, integration, and general evaluation of the research you have presented.

##### ***Some things to remember as you write***

1. Be sure to treat the entire document as a whole, connecting and integrating the articles you review THROUGHOUT your paper, as well as in your conclusion. This is often done through the use of transition sentences/clauses. Think about how each article or study relates to everything else and make those connections explicit to the reader. Similarly, you may want to draw conclusions at the end of smaller sections that you again revisit at the end of your paper.
2. Don't forget to support your assertions. Cite authors/articles, when appropriate. When you make a point, be sure to back it up either with a logical argument or empirical evidence.
3. Conclusions should be based on the research you present in the paper. Do not draw conclusions that have no basis in that research.
4. Look for good examples of literature reviews and introduction sections in the literature on your topic. Note what authors do in presenting the literature in your area.
5. Use APA style guidelines! Check the APA manual and course web page for correct format, and write in the scholarly style specified by the guidelines. This means avoiding slang and other informal forms like colloquialisms or contractions, and staying away from personal opinions. Avoid using a narrative style (this work is not a diary entry or a story, but a formal piece of writing).
6. Be sure to proofread your paper thoroughly and revise and rewrite. One draft will not likely pass muster. Don't rely solely on my edits/feedback; read and re-read and edit the paper yourself each time you re-work your paper.

##### ***Remember***

###### ***A lit review:***

- is a formal piece of writing
- contains thoughtful analysis of material
- contains assertions that are supported by logical argument or empirical research
- looks (in structure) like the introduction of a research (empirical) article

###### ***...A lit review is not:***

- just a summary of research...analysis is required
- a narrative piece of writing...no need to entertain, just be clear
- a summary of all research on the topic...choose carefully only research that directly relates to your topic.