



Social Science
Literature
Review



Center for Social Science Scholarship
& UMBC Library

The Literature Review

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Liberally adapted from Prof. Musgrove (UMBC),
University of Guelph, UNC, and others

A Literature Review:

- *Analyzes* and *synthesizes* scholarly conversation
- Discusses arguments scholars have made / are making
- Shows the conversation has changed over time.

Demonstrates your awareness of larger scholarly conversation on your given topic.

Steps for writing a Lit. Review

- Identify Research Question – of course...
- Find your Sources
- Organize & Synthesize your Sources
- Write the Review

How NOT to write a Lit. Review

Introduction

- Theory / Argument / Hypothesis

Author₁ says this ...

Author₂ says this ...

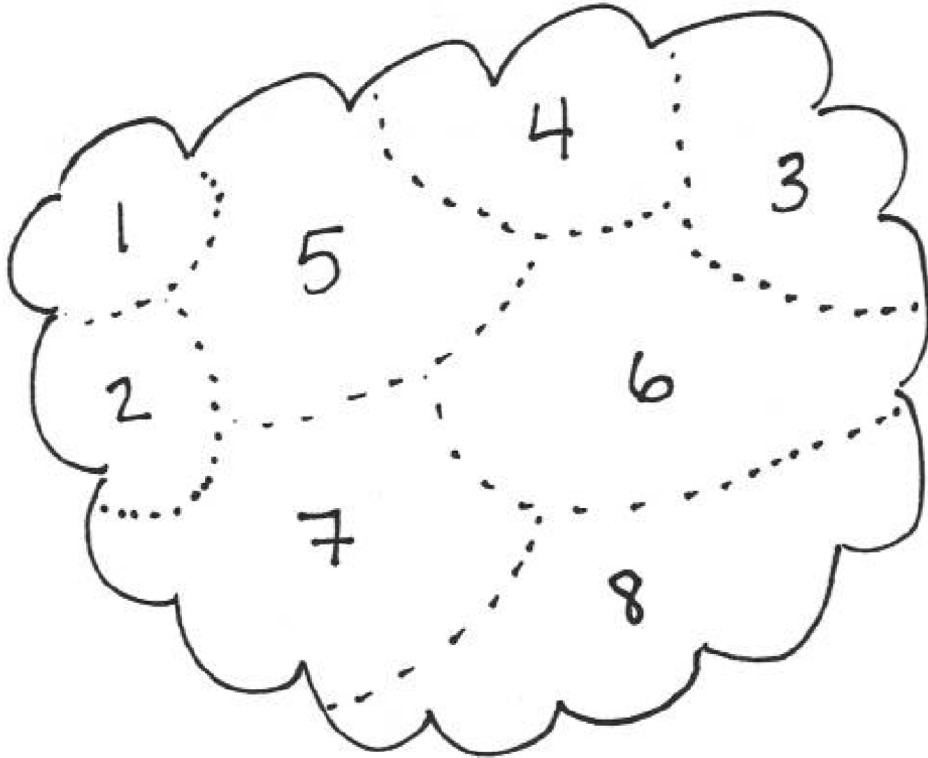
Author₃ says this ...

Author_∞ says this ...

Conclusion

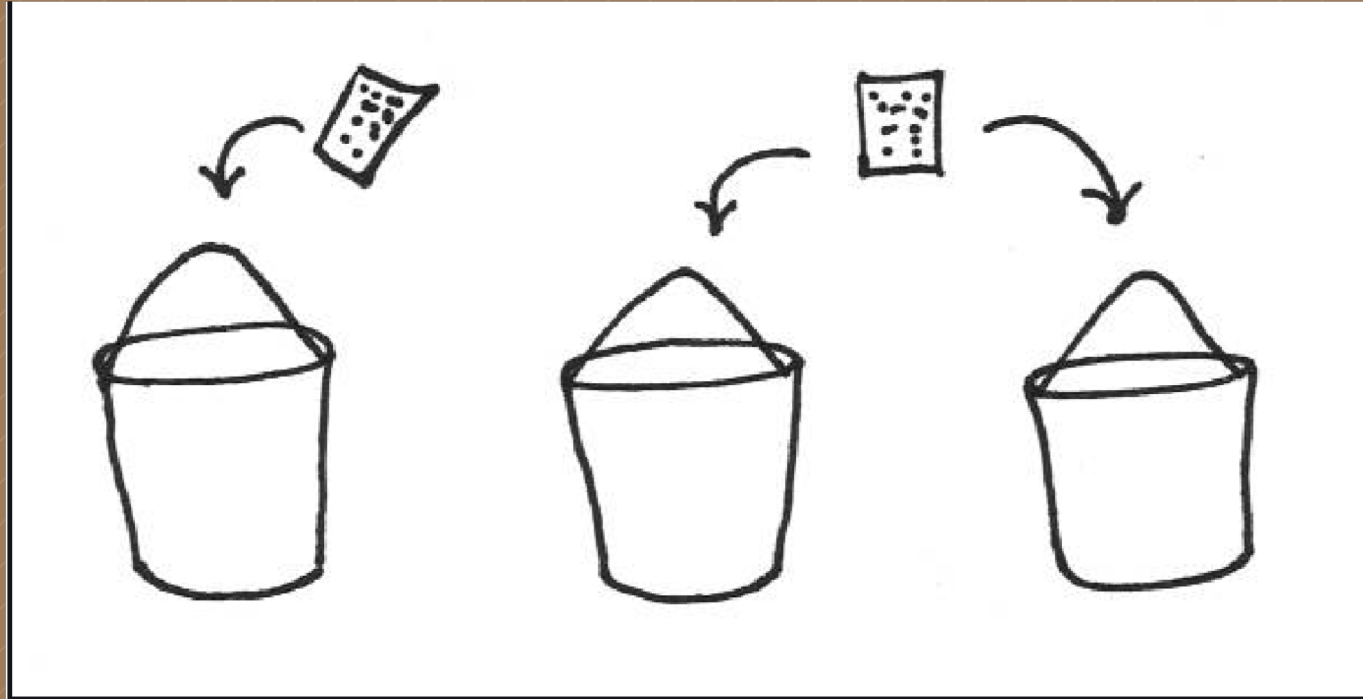
All summary, No synthesis

One way of thinking about a Lit. Review



A large thought bubble with multiple sections or themes

Another Way of thinking about a Lit. Review




A series of buckets into which you groups different takes on a field or topic

Theme-Based Literature Review


Introduction

- Theory / Argument / Hypothesis

Theme 1: _____ (subheading)

- Author₁
 - Author₂
 - Author₃
- 

Theme 2: _____ (subheading)

- Author₄
 - Author₅
 - Author₆
- 

Conclusion

How TO write a Lit. Review

Steps

Pick a working topic: consult with your advisor, other faculty, and review older works done in your department.

Choose the literature you will review: Select databases and other lit sources & start identifying subject headings/ descriptors/ that are appropriate. Start identifying classic studies, theories, and theorists.

Analyze: Read broadly to start and identify assumptions, methodologies, testing procedures, and research findings. Note often-cited authors, major works, conflicting theories and contested results & how theories evolve (or not) over time.

Steps, cont.

- **Organize** - group your selected articles by identified patterns and themes: common findings, major trends in the research, which theories emerge as most influential.
- **Develop your thesis** - write a concise statement summarizing your conclusions about major trends and developments.
- **Organize your paper** – Develop headings and subheadings. The sections of your paper should link and progress thematically / topically, not by focusing on the work of individual researchers.
- **Write and review** – Focus on analysis: compare and evaluate the literature rather than list developments chronologically. Analysis and synthesis are the crucial elements.

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Look at examples:
ProQuest
dissertations



Questions?

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