LITERATURE REVIEWS

WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?

Literature Reviews (sometimes called, "The Review of Literature") are components of papers, commonly found in the introductory section of most research papers. The Literature Review helps the reader to discover "what has been said before" in relation to the topic. The Literature Review also inevitably sets the stage for a new theory, hypothesis, or concept to be introduced through new research.

In essence, Literature Reviews help the reader to "catch up" to the academic/scientific conversation and even "fill in holes" in their own understand of the topic. Thus, the Literature Review helps the reader maintain a better understanding of the topic/subject matter before encountering a new addition to the discipline and its scholarship.

Drawing from different sources, a Literature Review discusses general thoughts on the topic, relevant data, results, commentary, recommendations, opinions/attitudes, etc. from the previous research completed on the topic/subject matter.

PURPOSE

Instead of resembling a bibliography or a simple list of secondary sources/research, the Literature Review actually "reviews" previous works by providing descriptions or summaries of previous works on the topic and evaluates the contents of the previous research.

Sometimes, the Literature Review may also provide context to the creation or publication of such documents. However, oftentimes, the Literature Review simply discusses one source's relationship to others in the field/discipline.

LITERATURE REVIEWS ARE "DIALOGICAL"

Ideally, Literature Reviews try to act like a "dialogue" between the secondary sources (where one author/document may agree or disagree the claims or evidence of another author/document on the topic). Literature Reviews are simply created with the intention of allowing documents to compare and contrast their different orientations, evidence, or claims, while helping the reader to see what has been said before about the topic.

Because of their "dialogical" nature, literature reviews may contain short snippets of passages, quotes, paraphrases, and summaries of important material in order to illustrate the ideas of the different authors/groups.

Example:

Author A, in his work "Title" claims that "X is a very serious problem which affects thousands of people." However, Author B, in his work "Title" presents a counter claim, where he suggests, "X" is not as significant as previously thought. Author C, admits that X is an important issue, but presents a slightly different view of the issue claims, "X proliferates but the quality and quantity are often underestimated."

The purpose of a "dialogical" style is to enable the reader to imagine the different author's and/or their sources/documents talking to each other. Hence, both sources have a "dialogue."

LINE-BY-LINE PRESENTATION
The author of a Literature Reviews may opt to use a line-by-line methodology to create the Literature Review. In this practice, the author may use single sentences to discuss different sources with relevance to the topic. Immediately in the same sentence, the author may compare or contrast this thought/source with another.

Example:
Source X says X, while Source Y says Y.
X and Y substantially differ in their methodologies.

ABSTRACT-BY-ABSTRACT PRESENTATION
The author of the Literature Review may opt to use an abstract-by-abstract presentation, where the author simply includes very short summaries/abstracts and transitions between such summaries/abstracts.

The most basic and sufficient literature reviews contain a very mundane collection of abstracts/summaries of previous work on the subject/topic. Oftentimes, a writer may pile such works onto each other chronological starting from the earliest work to the most recent work.

Example:
Source X discusses… (abstract here)*. While Source Y agrees… (abstract here)*. However, Source Z disagrees and discusses… (abstract here)*

(*) One would expect to find paragraph-long summaries pointing out the specific positions of each document.

TOPICAL VS. CHRONOLOGICAL
Literature Reviews may be "topically-driven" by knowledge about the topic (where the most widely understood and available information/research comes first followed by the least understood, or available information/research).

Or, more simply, the Literature Review may be "chronological," engaging a sense of time, where the oldest information/research appears first followed by the latest information/research.

Oftentimes, one can expect a combination of both approaches, where the old and least available information is discussed first followed by the newest, latest, and most available information. Occasionally, but more rarely, this may be reversed (i.e., the newest information is presented first and the oldest information is presented last).

REVIEW VS. CRITIQUE

As mentioned previously, a Literature Review works to see what has been said about the topic in the past. However, on the other hand, a Literature Reviews works by allowing the writer to critique or analyze the different methodologies or outcomes (i.e., results/conclusions).

Example: (critique)
Source Z completed their qualitative study. However, they did not confirm their findings with the target group (i.e., their respondents), which calls their final claims into question and suggests a possible research bias on the part of the author. Oftentimes, a methodology allowing the author to confirm data with the respondent is preferable.

Literature Reviews may compare and contrast various author's claims and data. Or, simply, they may be written in a pro's vs. con's style orientation, where one work is shown preference over another work.

Example: (pros vs. cons style)
While Source X says X. Their small sample size suggests the study may be inconclusive with its data. However, source Y has a larger sample size, which yields more substantial data.

Note: It is not uncommon for a Literature Review to reveal flaws, errors, or fallacies found in previous research. Sometimes, the purpose of the Literature Review may be to "correct" a problem in previous research.

Example:
Author X suggests that Palm Oil is an acceptable ingredient for foods. However, this earlier research failed to account for Palm and Rapeseed Oil very carcinogenic properties.

HOW TO APPROACH THE SOURCES
Literature Reviews are typically composed by locating and discussing the most relevant previous research on a topic. Included are "seminal" (or strongly influential) scholarly articles, books, or other documents, relevant old and new research on the topic, and expert opinion/commentary.

Start by creating detailed abstracts/summaries of past works on the topic looking for the most important articles, books, or documents related to the topic. Note: Typically, these articles are referenced the most compared to other works on the topic.

As you write your abstract or summary, take notes and record important information from the original source. These "lines" may be used to create your Literature Review (see the example below).

Once you are done, decide how to organize the contents. Do you want them to have a dialogue? Do you want to compare and contrast? Do you simply want to stack them on

top of each other from oldest to most recent? Do you want to mention and then critique them one at a time.

Example: (The example below shows how to read and abstract a source before including its contents into a Literature Review. Oftentimes, reading and summarizing (or abstracting) the work comes first. Next, exact important lines/passages from the work which would serve to inform the audience about the document.

Pellitteri, J., Stern, R., and Nakhutina, L. (1999). Music: The Sounds of Emotional Intelligence. Voices from the Middle. 7.1, pp. 25-28.

Abstract
This work explains how music can contribute to positive educational experiences within the middle school classroom. The authors consider how and why music can be a useful educational medium and a pivotal connection to the development and acquisition of emotional intelligence. The authors provide some discussion of how music promotes the development of emotional intelligence and even provide some exercises. They discuss how music provides a source of arousal and creates a structure with which to contain emotional experiences as songs have a beginning, middle, and end with tensions and release, even improvisation. They provide some evidence in their work that listening to music (as well as the practice of music) helps in the development of some of the rudimentary skills of emotional perception.

Notes
25 – "Music can express feelings that struggle to find words, create and change moods, bring back memories, and be imbued with meaning."
25 – "Music is not only a form of entertainment; it can be a powerful tool with which to engage others."
25 – "Music has been used as a form of therapy with children and adults because it can reach beyond the limitations of disabilities."
25 – "Emotional intelligence, like other types of intelligence, is a set of skills.
25 – "Emotional intelligence… ha to do with emotional information. The abilities to recognize emotions, to manage emotions, and to use emotional knowledge are the main components that comprise emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).
25-26 – "Emotionally intelligent people will be attentive and accurate in detecting these cues in others as well as themselves. Other words that describe these skills are empathy (the ability to understand what another person is feeling) and self-awareness or self-reflection (the ability to understand aspects of one's own experiences).
27 – "There are many reasons why music is a powerful tool in emotional learning. The connection between music and emotions has been noted throughout the history of human evolution… believed to serve many purposes, such as emotional expression, communication, mating calls, and precursors to spoken language" (Radocy & Boyle, 1998).
27- "Music is a natural human activity."
27 – "It is well known that music affects heart rate, pulse rate, and breathing. Music creates and transforms moods and because of this, it is ideal for emotional learning experiences."

27 – "Music provides not only a source of arousal, but also creates a structure with which to contain emotional experiences [songs have a beginning, middle, and end… there are tensions and release, even improvisation]."

27 – "Improvisation, which is the unplanned and spontaneous creation of music, is a mode of activity used often by music therapist treating individuals with emotional nd physical disabilities (Bruscia, 1988).

27 - "In the creation of music, participants feel the tension release through sound and can find a cathartic expression of their own emotions within the structure of the song.

27-28 – "In one activity, students create music as a group. The teacher leads the song and accompanies on a piano or guitar as the children improvise simple percussion… this fosters group cohesion as every member is united with a common beat… this game like activity requires the participants to exert control over their actions and emotions."

28 – "The structure of the music and the motivation to play the instrument create an opportunity for the students to exert control over themselves while in an emotionally excited state."

28 – [Another exercise is explained]

28 – Listening to [recorded] music or to music created by other students is a type of activity that can increase the perception of emotional cues, a basic skill of emotional intelligence. One way is to teach the children to be attentive to the characteristics of the music such as softness or loudness, the high and low movement of the melodic motif, or, the tone quality of a particular instrument.

28 – There is some evidence the children learn to be aware of their own internal cues by listening to music (heartbeat, breathing, tensions, visual associations, etc.).

28 – Listening to music helps in the development of some of the rudimentary skills of emotional perception.