ALEC 604: Writing for Professional Publication

Week 6: Literature Review

Activities
- Collect scholarly journal articles
- Evaluate the contribution of collected articles
- Develop an Introduction for your research manuscript

Scholarly Journal Articles
- How do you know it is a scholarly journal?
  - Professors
  - Peers
  - Web of Science
- Evaluating premier articles:
  - Outstanding articles selected by editorial boards
  - Review the Literature Reviews Guide
  - Review the questions in the Journal Article Review Guide

Literature Review
- What question (problem) did you study?
  - Should be at the end of your Introduction or Literature Review
- How do you know you’ve collected the correct sources for your Introduction?
- How do you write a convincing storyline that leads to asking your question?
- Will the introduction lend itself to asking the stated problem, or reason for your study?

Collecting Your Sources
- Important researcher skill; from experience:
  - Reviewing the premier journals in your field
  - Writing for the premier journals in your field
  - Knowledge is imperfect – you can’t find it all
  - Information overload:
    - Many papers with many facts; not all are relevant
    - Locate significant points in each paper quickly

Reviewing Articles
- Articles almost always have:
  - Abstract
  - Background (Introduction, Literature Review, etc.)
  - Methods
  - Results
  - Discussion
  - Conclusions
- Which are the most important parts to read?
- Which sections should be read first or last?
**Reviewing Articles – my order**

- Abstract:
  - Saves time; a must read for relevancy
- Conclusions:
  - Can be limited to discussion
  - Check for integration of other sources
- Methods:
  - Reliability/validity, non-response, etc.
  - Appropriate methods used - How was it studied?

**Reviewing Articles – my order**

- Results and Discussion:
  - What I care about most; what was found?
  - Is there a logical accounting of all results?
- Background:
  - Useful if you’re new to the subject
  - Good trail for other sources

**Writing a Great Introduction**

- Should be a synthesis of your topic of study
  - Describes the “big picture”
  - Provides new insights into past questions
  - Focused writing produces logical storylines
- Bad introductions are:
  - Mere collections of quotes; stringing studies
  - Devoid of critical analysis of previous literature

**Introduction**

- Creates interest
- Uses a “funnel” organizational approach
- Includes known, unknown, and the question
  - Nature and scope of the problem
  - Gaps in the literature
  - Previous findings
  - Pertinent literature
  - Hypotheses/research question signals

**Introduction**

- Practice brevity, but leave no logic holes
- Present tense for what is currently true
- Past tense for previous findings
- Past tense to state the question
- Common errors:
  - Too much background
  - No gap in knowledge mentioned
  - No question posed

**How to Signal the Question**

- To determine . . .
- The purpose of this study was . . .
- This report describes experiments designed to determine . . .
- Therefore, our objective was to determine . . .
### Writing an Introduction

- Sample the literature appropriately:
  - Appropriately depends on your topic
  - Familiarity with the topic
  - Relevance of the topic in your field of study
  - Related literature
- Search depth and breadth:
  - Too broad and you’ll have too much to read
  - Too narrow and you’ll lack sufficient support

### Systematic Organization

- **Themes**
  - Categorize material by relevant themes
  - Check each theme against your question
  - “Will this article help answer my question?”
  - If the answer is no, discard it!
  - Organize the remaining material logically
    - Build from general to specific (Deductive)
    - Build from specific to general (Inductive)

### Systematic Foundation

- **Time**
  - Build from historical foundation to current research
  - Address most current studies and work back to foundational theory

### Common Mistakes

- Including too little information for the reader to understand the reason for your question
- Including too few references to support the statements being made
- Scattering information without logical order
  - Ideas do not flow from paragraph to paragraph
  - Ideas are not translated from section to section

### Summary

- Critical evaluation of sources aids in writing the introduction for your manuscript
- Sufficient scholarly sources help you:
  - Explain “what,” Describe “how,” Reference “who,” and Support “why” your current study is needed
- Writing a literature review does not have to be an unachievable task if appropriate strategies are used to accomplish it