

The Lit Review - A Step-by-Step Guide (adapted from Walden Writing Center)

Step 1 - Preread Articles:

- A. **Read the article's abstract** to gain a general understanding of the article's contents.
- B. **Read the paragraph before the methodology section.** In this paragraph, researchers will generally state their hypothesis, reiterate their research questions, or summarize their purpose for research.
- C. **Scan all the headings throughout the article.** This will give you an idea about the outline followed in the article, and a better understanding of the subtopics the researchers chose to investigate in their research.
- D. **Read the first few paragraphs under the last heading.** These paragraphs often state major findings.

Step 2 - Get Organized

- A. **Group your articles into categories** that correspond to different **themes** you plan to present in your review.
- B. It may seem old-fashioned, but colored post-it notes can help you keep track of different themes in your text. Stock up on post-notes or on highlighters, or become familiar with your Word processor's tools for highlighting text in different colors.

Step 3 - Download and fill in your [Literature Review Matrix](#):

This organizational resource (see [example](#)) will help you make note of important information from each of your sources that will come in handy later in your literature review process. This step is time consuming now, but it will help you save time later.

- A. What theoretical or conceptual framework was posed in this article? What are the key definitions and areas of exploration?
- B. What were the research questions and hypotheses?
- C. What methodology did the researcher follow? Is this a qualitative or quantitative study?

D. What did the analysis reveal? Were there any surprising finds?

E. What did the researchers conclude? Was their hypothesis correct? Were all the research questions answered?

F. What are the implications for future research? Did you identify gaps in research?

G. What are the implications for practice in this field?

Step 4 - Synthesis (Beyond Summarizing):

In order to synthesize your sources, you must first analyze them to help provide rationale for why they are a part of your literature review and what role they play within your field. In order to demonstrate analysis, you must provide your commentary on the sources you discuss **beyond simply summarizing (analysis free) them:**

As Harper (2001) noted, instructors cannot identify every one of their students' emotional intelligences (EI). Faculty members do not have the time, and students simply are not that forthcoming with their learning preferences (Harper, 2001). Furthermore, as Harper warned, if instructors decide to attempt a complete analysis of every student's EI, they will inevitably hold the entire class back. After all, taking time to adequately diagnose a student's EI means less time for helping students meet the expectations set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act (Harper, 2001).

There is no analysis or critique in the excerpt (above).. There is strong paraphrasing, and this passage provides a decent overview of Harper, but it addresses only Harper's ideas and does not explain why this information is important and how it relates to the author's overall purpose for the paper. The reader needs to know the answer to "So what, and who cares?" What is missing from this summary is context and analysis.

Notice how the author demonstrated analysis and synthesis in just a few additional sentences:

Harper (2001), however, disagreed with Sigree's (1999) assertion. Harper noted that despite the obvious benefits of diagnosing a student's emotional intelligence (EI; Jones & Hammer, 1998; Mooney, 1998; Sigree, 1999), instructors cannot identify every one of their students' EIs (Harper, 2001). Faculty members do not have the time, and students are not that forthcoming with their learning preferences (Harper, 2001).

For Harper (2001), though, the real issue was not with instructors' belief in EI, but rather in how this belief affected classroom logistics. Instructors who follow Earnhart's (1996) advice to "Take the time to understand how each of your students learn" (p. 33) are being impractical, Harper argued. Taking time to adequately diagnose a student's EI means less time for helping

students meet the expectations set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act (Harper, 2001). Although Earnhart's (1996) vision is ideal, Harper takes a more practical stance.

With Harper's (2001) concerns in mind, I cannot endorse Finkelstein and Kramer's (2002) findings...

Here, the author is synthesizing the literature.

- A. We know, based on the author's direction, how Harper interacts with the other literature on the topic.**
- B. We know that Harper is probably in the minority, and we know the author's take on Harper.**
- C. Finally, we know how and why the author is using Harper: Harper will be used to refute Finkelstein and Kramer, which presumably is the author's intent or thesis.**

Check out some more Literature Review examples and resources [here](#).