

FAQ TO CONDUCT AND WRITE A LITERATURE REVIEW

David Rosenberg

1) Why do I need to review literature?

- Provide background on the problem and the prior work by others to solve the problem.
- Identify the early, pioneering work in a field.
- Allow a novice to get up to speed on your subject through additional reading.
- Synthesize strengths, limits, commonalities, differences, progression, etc. of prior work.
- Help establish the rationale for and contribution of your (new) work.

2) What counts as literature?

- Peer-reviewed work published in
 - Journals (see box)
 - Books
- Non-peer reviewed publications (grey literature)
 - Government or NGO reports
 - PhD and Masters theses
 - Conference presentations
 - Personal communication with authors
 - Unpublished manuscripts and data
 - Newspaper or magazine articles
- The Wikipedia does NOT count!! (although article references might be a good place to start)

Some peer-reviewed Water Journals

- Water Resources Research
- ASCE-Journal of Water Resources Planning and Management
- Journal of Hydrology
- Water Resources Management
- Hydrology and Earth Systems Science
- Water International
- Water Policy
- Journal of the American Water Resources Association
- Advances in Water Resources
- Journal AWWA (American Water Works Association)
- And many, many more

3) How should I start my literature search?

- Browse paper copies of journals in the Library
- Browse/search journal web pages online
- Search [electronic databases](#) available through the [USU library](#). Some good ones are:
 - [Water Resources Abstracts](#)
 - [Web of Science](#), and many, many, many more!
- Search [Google](#) or [Google Scholar](#)
- A great feature of Google Scholar and many electronic databases is they link through the USU library catalogue directly to subscription-based content.
- Make an appointment with a reference librarian at [Merrill-Cazier](#) ([Book a Librarian](#))

4) I enter my search terms in _____ but nothing comes up. What should I do?

- Broaden your search terms. For example, try “Water Price Utah” rather than “Increasing Block Prices in Logan”. Use the OR operator: “Logan” OR “Utah”
- Use wildcards, for example, “water pric*” to include “price”, “prices”, and “pricing”.
- Use synonyms. For example, try “Rates” or “Billing” or “Charges” instead of “price.”

5) I enter my search terms and get a bagillion results. What should I do?

- Narrow your search terms. For example, use “Price Response” rather than “Price.”
- Restrict by location, date, phrase, and other keywords. Use the AND operator.

FAQ TO CONDUCT AND WRITE A LITERATURE REVIEW, continued

6) I found a few promising articles, how can I quickly find more?

1. Read the references cited in the article. Read the references cited by those references.
2. Click the **Cited By** link in [Google Scholar](#) or **Times Cited** link in Web of Science to see more *recent* articles that cite the article of interest.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 on each new article to further explore the reference/citation tree.
4. Use keywords listed in the article for new searches.
5. Search on the article's author name see if s/he has additional, related work.
6. Contact the author to ask if s/he has new, recent, related work or knows of any.

7) How can I easily track, save, and electronically organize search results?

- Use reference manager software like [EndNote](#) or ProCite.
- Enter the item as soon as you find it and decide its relevance. For electronic sources, be sure to also record the date you accessed the material.
- Use the "Export citation" feature available on most electronic journals and databases or the "Bibliography Manager" available in Scholar Preferences in [Google Scholar](#) to auto-transfer the reference/citation information to your reference software program.
- Save an electronic copy of the article locally. The internet changes quickly and content may not be available tomorrow or next week.

8) So I have my citations, what's next?

- Read each article you found and describe it using an annotated bibliography.
- For each reference, write one paragraph that summarizes all the important stuff--the problem, context, approach, key findings, and contribution of the work.

9) How do I synthesize my annotated bibliography into a literature review?

- Answer the following questions:
 - What is the story you will construct from the citations?
 - How will you tell it? Chronologically? By subject area? By authors? Other?
 - Where does the story begin? How does it progress? Where and how does it end?
 - What from the annotated bibliography will you share for each article/citation?
 - What additional common points, differences, and progressions do you want to emphasize for individual or groups of citations?
- Write according to your answers above and use your annotated bibliography.
- Use a [Synthesis Matrix](#)

10) What other suggestions can you offer?

- Examine articles you've collected to see how they reviewed their literature.
- Allow plenty of time. Searching, reading, describing search results, and synthesis may require breaks. Or, you may identify gaps that require you to return to earlier steps.
- A literature review need not be all text. Use tables or figures to synthesize prior work.
- Subscribe to journal and database "alerts" that email you when new articles are published that match your search criteria or cite works you have highlighted.
- Read more [detailed guides to conduct and write literature reviews](#).
- Again, make an appointment with a Reference Librarian! ([Book a Librarian](#))