

Practical Research

Planning and Design

Chapter 3

Review of the Related Literature

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Objectives of Chapter 3

Understanding how to best use libraries and online resources to find relevant material

Getting the most out of the sources you find

Benefits of Conducting a Literature Review

- New ideas, perspectives, and approaches
- Inform you about other researchers in the same area
- How to handle methodological and design issues
- Can reveal new sources of data
- Can introduce you to other measurement tools

Benefits of Conducting a Literature Review (continued)

- Methods of dealing with similar problem situations
- Help with interpretation and connecting your results to previous work
- Increase confidence in worthiness of your topic since others have invested time in studying it

In short: the more you know about investigations and perspectives related to your topic, the more effectively you can tackle your own research problem.

Sources and Strategies for Locating Related Literature

- Identify keywords
- Library catalog—books, periodicals, microfilm
- Use indexes, abstracts, and other general references
- Use the library's online databases
- Reference librarians
- Government publications: www.gpoaccess.gov
- Search the Web
- Examine citations and reference lists of others

Principal Systems for Classification of Knowledge

Dewey Decimal system: The main classification system in public libraries and probably the most generally accepted system worldwide.

Library of Congress system: The main classification system used in college and university libraries.

Guidelines: Using Your Library Time Efficiently

- Go to the library armed with data-gathering tools.
- Identify the materials (books, articles, etc.) you want to read, and determine if they are available in your library.
- Develop an organized plan of attack for finding the sources you've identified.
- Track down your sources.
- Record all basic information as you read each source.
- Identify strategies for obtaining sources that are not immediately available.

Alternate strategies for locating hard-to-find sources

- Put a hold on a book that's checked-out
- Recall a checked-out book
- Interlibrary loan
- Google books for older and out-of-print books
- Bookstore
- Online database document delivery service

How do you know you're done?

When you start going in circles

If you see the same researchers and similar methods over and over, you've probably seen enough to have a good overview of the topic

Evaluating, Organizing, and Synthesizing the Literature

- Never take other people's conclusions at face value; determine for yourself whether the conclusions are justified based on the data presented. If possible, read the original source.
- Organize the ideas you encounter during your review.
- Synthesize what you've learned:
 - Compare and contrast positions on the topic
 - Show how approaches have changed over time
 - Describe general trends
 - Identify and explain contradictory findings
 - Identify general themes

Guidelines: Writing a Clear and Cohesive Literature Review

- Get the proper psychological orientation
- Have a plan
- Emphasize relatedness to your research problem
- Give credit where credit is due; use appropriate citations
- Review the literature, don't reproduce it
- Summarize what you've said
- Remember that your first draft will not be your last draft
- Ask others for advice and feedback