

# Composing Literature Reviews

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# Overview

- Discuss goals and purpose of literature reviews
- Review strategies for composing and structuring literature reviews

# Goals of Literature Reviews

- Lit Reviews are a genre of publication

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- Summarize scholarship surrounding a specific issue or research question
- Offer comprehensive overview of conversations happening in contemporary research

# Goals of Literature Reviews

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- Great for introducing scholars to a new field
- Also helpful for identifying research avenues for established scholars

# Goals of Literature Reviews

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- Main focus is on summarizing prior scholarship
- No new evidence is introduced. Only “evidence” being analyzed is previously-published work



# Goals of Literature Reviews

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- Example: narrating disagreements between scholars is a type of argument

# Goals of Literature Reviews

- How can you make an argument without making an argument?

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- How can you make an argument without making an argument?
- Answer: transitions

# Goals of Literature Reviews

- Transitions between sources can create an implied argument
- Can imply overlap or conflict between sources
- Can imply common foundation or moments of progress

# Goals of Literature Reviews

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- Transitions are how you synthesize several sources into a single, coherent narration
- A collection of disconnected summaries is not a lit review
- Simply listing summaries of sources won't help your audience

# Goals of Literature Reviews

- Why is this important?



# Goals of Literature Reviews

- Writing lit reviews requires two complimentary, but distinct, mindsets

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- Writing lit reviews requires two complimentary, but distinct, mindsets
- Summarizing sources
- Synthesizing sources (via transitions)

# Strategies for Summarizing

- **Summary = stating the most important facts of scholarship**

# Strategies for Summarizing

- Focus on primary claim or central argument

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- Academic writing often has a primary claim and several secondary claims
- Prioritize the author's foundational argument or research question

# Strategies for Summarizing

- Also explain how authors support their claims

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- Also explain how authors support their claims
- Narrate research methods used to gather and analyze evidence
- Don't get too caught up in specifics of evidence, focus on methodologies and conclusions drawn

# Strategies for Summarizing

- OK, so let's say you have your sources summarized



# Strategies for Summarizing

- OK, so let's say you have your sources summarized
- How do we synthesize these summaries?
- How do we create effective transitions?

# Structuring a Review

- Lit Reviews are often structured in two different ways
- Historical approach
- Here-and-now approach

# Structuring a Review

- Historical approach

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- Historical approach
- Summarize early scholarship
- Then narrate how subsequent scholarship builds upon prior findings (show the history of a field)

# Structuring a Review

- Transitions can identify advances in research methods
- Transitions can discuss moments of debate
- Transitions can show evolution of initial research question

# Structuring a Review

- Key thing: avoid stating that earlier research directly caused later research to emerge

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- Key thing: avoid stating that earlier research directly caused later research to emerge
- If later research identifies its influences, you can note it
- Focus on how broader ideas and methods have changed over time

# Structuring a Review

- Here-and-now approach



# Structuring a Review

- Here-and-now approach
- Provides overview of current scholarship
- Works best with inter- or multi-disciplinary research

# Structuring a Review

- Start by “grouping” summarized sources

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- Start by “grouping” summarized sources
- Within each “group,” transitions show commonality
- Transitions between different “groups” show main differences

# Structuring a Review

- “Differences” are not always debates and disagreements

# Structuring a Review

- Differences can be within research methods
- Differences can be nature of evidence analyzed
- Differences can be the conclusions drawn
- Differences can be real-world applications

# Structuring a Review

- Here-and-now approach works best with emerging research

# Structuring a Review

- Here-and-now approach works best with emerging research
- Timeframe is shorter but scope is broader
- Emphasize nuance and complexity (as opposed to evolution over time)

# Conclusion

- Let's recap



# Conclusion

- Lit reviews are comprehensive and objective
- Transitions are how you synthesize summaries into a single narration
- Can be structured historically or take a here-and-now approach

# Conclusion

- The ORSSP Lab has consultants to help with both quantitative and qualitative research questions
- Webinars that discuss writing strategies
- Resources to help authors draft writing at every stage