Social Science Literature Review
Center for Social Science Scholarship & UMBC Library
The Literature Review

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Liberally adapted from Prof. Musgrove (UMBC),
University of Guelph, UNC, and others
A Literature Review:

- Analyzes and *synthesizes* scholarly conversation
- Discusses arguments scholars have made / are making
- Shows the conversation has changed over time.

Demonstrates your awareness of larger scholarly conversation on your given topic.
Steps for writing a Lit. Review

• Identify Research Question – of course...
• Find your Sources
• Organize & Synthesize your Sources
• Write the Review
How NOT to write a Lit. Review

Introduction
- Theory / Argument / Hypothesis

Author_1 says this ...

Author_2 says this ...

Author_3 says this ...

Author_∞ says this ...

Conclusion

All summary, No synthesis
One way of thinking about a Lit. Review

A large thought bubble with multiple sections or themes
Another Way of thinking about a Lit. Review

A series of buckets into which you groups different takes on a field or topic
How TO write a Lit. Review

Theme-Based Literature Review

Introduction
- Theory / Argument / Hypothesis

Theme 1: ________________ (subheading)
- Author_1
- Author_2
- Author_3

Theme 2: ________________ (subheading)
- Author_4
- Author_5
- Author_6

Conclusion
Steps

Pick a working topic: consult with your advisor, other faculty, and review older works done in your department.

Choose the literature you will review: Select databases and other lit sources & start identifying subject headings/ descriptors/ that are appropriate. Start identifying classic studies, theories, and theorists.

Analyze: Read broadly to start and identify assumptions, methodologies, testing procedures, and research findings. Note often-cited authors, major works, conflicting theories and contested results & how theories evolve (or not) over time.
Steps, cont.

- **Organize** - group your selected articles by identified patterns and themes: common findings, major trends in the research, which theories emerge as most influential.

- **Develop your thesis** - write a concise statement summarizing your conclusions about major trends and developments.

- **Organize your paper** – Develop headings and subheadings. The sections of your paper should link and progress thematically / topically, not by focusing on the work of individual researchers.

- **Write and review** – Focus on analysis: compare and evaluate the literature rather than list developments chronologically. Analysis and synthesis are the crucial elements.
Look at examples: ProQuest dissertations
Questions?

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