The Literature Review Process

The “literature” represents an on-going scholarly conversation. A literature review “re-views” – looks again – at what others have said, done, found in a particular area. The “literature” you choose will inform what you write, so plan searches carefully.

Search

An informed, purposeful, systematic approach to literature searching will help:

- reduce time spent looking for information
- maximize quality and appropriateness of results
- clarify the scope of your research topic
- define and “refine” the research question(s)
- identify relevant data sources and appropriate research methods
- locate a ‘niche’ or a ‘gap’ in the literature
- identify experts/ important works in the field

Select & Assess quality and relevance

Methodological quality:

- Do the methods fit the nature of the research questions (qualitative/quantitative: experimental, descriptive, exploratory, program evaluation) using surveys, interviews, observations, etc.?
- Are methods described in sufficient detail for others to repeat or extend the study?
- Have authors indicated why particular procedures were used, the potential problems of the methods used, & limitations of their methods?
- Have the authors specified the statistical procedures used?
- Are the statistical methods appropriate?

Topic, population, context relevance:

- Does the article address your research questions and/or similar questions?
- Enhance your understanding of the topic?
- Examine similar populations in similar contexts?
- If not, can you reasonably extrapolate findings from this literature to your research?
- Does it point to a knowledge gap? Can you use it to justify the need for your research?

YOU ↔ LITERATURE

If not:
• Re-search if necessary – revise strategies, select new keywords, change databases, etc.
• Re-fine the research question(s)
• Re-assess the relevance of the literature
• Repeat process if necessary

The Literature

The literature will inform everything you do. Evaluate sources for quality and relevance to you; choose what to use carefully.

YOU <-> LITERATURE

Summarize each source with a matrix

Summarize each source to:
• Recap the important and most relevant information found in each source
• Identify variables
• Identify context/ setting
• Identify theories
• Identify findings
• Identify a need for more research in the area

Synthesize the body of literature

Integrate the literature – enter into the on-going scholarly conversation with your own narrative about how these perspectives, findings, and conclusions, fit together with one another – and – with your research questions
• Identify similarities and differences
• Trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates
• Reflect upon the importance of the body of literature for your research
• Evaluate the sources and advise the reader on the most pertinent or relevant.
The Review: Synthesize

Compare themes, methods, controversies. Craft your own narrative about how these perspectives, findings, and conclusions fit together with one another—and with your research.

YOU
Does flavoring increase the abuse liability of e-cigarettes with nicotine compared to unflavored e-cigarettes with nicotine?

YOU ↔ LITERATURE

- Berg, 2016
- Kalbhoran & Glantz, 2016
- McMillen et al., 2015
- Yoon et al., 2009
- Ray et al., 2006
- Reinforcing value of nicotine

- Pesko et al., 2016
- Lusier et al., 2005
- Rakotomatsika et al., 2005
- Reinforcing value of e-cigarette flavoring

- Goniewicz et al., 2014
- Siegel, 2011
- Villanti et al., 2013

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