

## How to Search and Cite the Literature

The review of the literature is an attempt to summarize the relevant field, and to help justify the need for the proposed research. Your treatment of the literature should be a critical analysis of what has been published, not a passive one (i.e., not just who did what when). In writing the literature review, your purpose is to convey to your reader **what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic**, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. As a piece of writing, the literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (e.g., your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing, or your argumentative thesis). It is not just a descriptive list of the material available, or a set of summaries.

### Develop a Search Strategy

- **Formulate a clear research question.** What is the **specific thesis, problem, or research question** that my literature review helps to define?
- **Identify the key concepts** for your research question and transfer them to a concept table.
- **Develop search terms** and keywords in order to identify a many relevant records as possible:
  - MeSH - Medical Subject Headings ([PubMed](#), [Medline via Ovid](#), [Cochrane](#))
  - Emtree ([Embase via Ovid](#))
  - CINAHL Headings ([CINAHL](#))
  - PsycINFO Thesaurus ([PsycInfo via Ovid](#))
- **Build a search phrase** by using Boolean operators (i.e., or, and, not).

### Consider your review strategy

- **What type of literature review am I conducting?** Am I looking at issues of theory? methodology? policy? quantitative research (e.g., on the effectiveness of a new procedure)? qualitative research (e.g., studies of loneliness among migrant workers)?
- **What is the scope of my literature review?** What types of publications am I using (e.g., journals, books, government documents, popular media)? What discipline am I working in (e.g., nursing psychology, sociology, medicine)?
- **How good was my information seeking?** Has my search been wide enough to ensure I've found all the relevant material? Has it been narrow enough to exclude irrelevant material? Is the number of sources I've used appropriate for the length of my paper?
- **Have I critically analyzed the literature I use?** Do I follow through a set of concepts and questions, comparing items to each other in the ways they deal with them? Instead of just listing and summarizing items, do I assess them, discussing strengths and weaknesses?
- **Have I cited and discussed studies contrary to my perspective?**
- **Will the reader find my literature review relevant, appropriate, and useful?**

### How to Cite Literature

- **Each journal will have a specific citation strategy that you will need to follow.** [Zotero/Endnote](#) make this easy with Cite-While-You-Write functions through a free Microsoft Word Add-in.
- **It is very important that you give credit to the source of any information or ideas that you present in your manuscript.** The source of the information or ideas must be credited directly in the text at the end of the relevant sentence.