

Preface

Creating a successful literature review is a complex project. This book serves as a logical road map to guide the researcher from finding a topic to researching, organizing, arguing, and composing the review. The many and varied skills needed for this project are sure to be more difficult to employ if learning is confined to trial and error. Here, gathered into one volume, are many of the strategies, tools, and techniques used by experienced researchers intent on building a high-quality literature review.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

This third edition has been updated, expanded, and newly reorganized to improve ease of use.

- The six-step process is directly aligned and explained using an applied critical-thinking model that demonstrates the logical progression needed to produce a quality literature review, while taking the mystery out of the process.
- Additional online guides and guidance have been added.
- *Reflective Oversight* boxes have been added to each chapter to direct metacognitive activities.
- New and updated graphics are included.
- Additional key vocabulary words have been added to the beginning of chapters and to the glossary.
- The process has been further simplified through topical reorganization and by the addition of lists of concepts that introduce Chapters 2–6. These lists make it easier for the reader to quickly find a needed concept.
- Examples have been expanded and added.
- More explanations and tips are provided for writing in the early stages of the project.

AUDIENCE

- Students wishing to preview the completion of a required literature review will find this book helpful as a means of clarifying what will be expected.
- Beginning researchers will find the book an excellent tool for learning the craft of producing a successful research project.

- More advanced students may use this text to review their skills and perhaps discover a few new tips.
- Those teaching the craft of research will find here an excellent class text for their students.

This book is mainly intended for two groups of researchers: those completing master's theses and those working on doctoral dissertations. For those doing a class research assignment or completing most master's degree projects, the text will address the type of literature review that summarizes and evaluates the existing knowledge on a particular topic. Some master's theses, and all doctoral dissertations, require a more sophisticated literature review. This book is also useful for the initial stage of completing a complex literature review, one that requires the student to argue and define a problem needing original research.

While much of the book uses education as its context, the model, strategies, and tools presented apply to a much wider audience within the social sciences. Because education is an applied science, many of the examples and strategies contained in this book consider the literature from a variety of vantage points, including social and organizational psychology, sociology, and group psychology. Thus, students studying these disciplines will also find this text helpful.

SPECIAL FEATURES AND TEXT ORGANIZATION

All students, beginning or advanced, can profit from a straightforward guide for maneuvering through the ambiguities of framing the topic, finding and managing information, developing the argument, and acquiring the composition skills needed to produce a successful literature review. There are definite tricks of the trade for making this project an efficient and rewarding experience. This text is organized using an applied critical-thinking model. The six-step literature review process guides the reader logically through the project. These steps are as follows:

- Step 1. Select a topic.
- Step 2. Develop the argument.
- Step 3. Search the literature.
- Step 4. Survey the literature.
- Step 5. Critique the literature.
- Step 6. Write the review.

Each chapter addresses a specific step of this model and contains several learning aids to increase reader comprehension. These learning aids include the following:

- Key vocabulary terms appear at the beginning of each chapter, allowing the reader to focus on key ideas.
- A chapter overview outlines the content of each chapter as a readiness tool.
- Exercises assist the reader through the more involved procedures. These guided practice opportunities and examples aid in making sure the reader understands the text.
- Specific references suggest software that can simplify the work of organizing material and revising the written composition.
- Graphics and charts clarify the key topics under discussion, and models present pictures that tie together complex themes and procedures.
- At the end of each chapter, tips provide specific ideas for using the material covered in the chapter. These tips help the reader make immediate, practical use of the material.
- Each chapter has a summary that gives a brief recap of the chapter's contents and acts as an aid for the reader to review information.
- Each chapter also contains a checklist. These lists allow the reader to track progress through the entire literature review project.
- The chapters end with reflective oversight boxes, which direct the reader to metacognition activities related to the chapter content.
- The end of the text contains a glossary of definitions of frequently used terms and a reference list of works for further reading.

When confronting the task of successfully producing a literature review, there are three choices. The researcher can proceed in an organized fashion using a book such as this one as a guide. It is also possible to search the Internet or go to YouTube and play roulette with a myriad of entries and explanations, hoping to find legitimate guidance. Or one can plunge blindly into the project and try to find the time and resources needed while hoping for the best. Experienced researchers know that trial and error is frustrating, time consuming, and rarely successful. Learning the key ideas in this text will promote success while limiting frustration and lost time.