

Dept. Writing
Fellow

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tion

How to Write a Literature Review

Shelby Grossman
Departmental Writing Fellow

October 2015

What can the Departmental Writing Fellow do for you?

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- Meet with you to give feedback on your writing for your thesis or Gov 94 paper
- Office hours Fridays from 2-5pm
- sgrossm@fas.harvard.edu

What is the purpose of a literature review

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- Concisely summarize key conclusions from existing research

What is the purpose of a literature review

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- Concisely summarize key conclusions from existing research
- Come to some conclusion about the accuracy or completeness of these conclusions

Attributes of a strong literature review

- “Impose some intellectual order on the material” –Knopf 2006

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Attributes of a strong literature review

- “Impose some intellectual order on the material” –Knopf 2006
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- Discuss what studies agree on

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- Weigh in on an existing debate

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- Keeps your voice front and center
- When writing, signpost! Have subheadings!

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Attributes of a weak literature review

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- Only summarizes

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- Only summarizes
- No synthesis

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- Only summarizes
- No synthesis
- List of paragraphs that summarize and then provide one sentence of synthesis
- Focuses only on your “proper noun” topic

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Immigrant Exclusion and Insecurity in Africa: Coethnic Strangers (2014) by Claire Adida

Research question: Why do some immigrant groups in West Africa integrate seamlessly, while others face exclusion and violence?

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What is the thesis statement of this literature review?

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What is the thesis statement of this literature review?

There are three sections of the literature review. What is happening in the second section?

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How is order imposed on the summaries?

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How is order imposed on the summaries?

Tricks for finding articles!

- Once you find a relevant article, read its literature review!

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Tricks for finding articles!

- Once you find a relevant article, read its literature review!
Then read its main sources! “Snowball strategy”

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Tricks for finding articles!

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Tricks for finding articles!

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Tricks for finding articles!

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- LibX: <http://library.harvard.edu/harvard-libx>

General Tricks!

- You can't always know your literature review framing in advance

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- The end of articles usually discuss topics for future research, can be useful if article is somewhat recent

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Overcoming literature review procrastination

Task 1: Figure out a strategy for organizing your notes

- Excel sheet

	A	B	C
10			
11	State predation/expropriation/property rights threat		
12	Dixit 2004	State should discriminate based on low skill or high skill person.	The state should
13	Olson 1993	Time horizon of predator.	Roving bandits v
14	See Townsend 1979, Mookherjee and Png 1989, Dixit says their theories can be applied to a predatory state		
15	North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009		Limited access o
16	Markus 2012	What firms do matters for property rights security	Predation is fund
17	Hellman, Jones, and Kaufmann 2003	Confusing. Distinction between countries where firms capture the state	captor firms=firm
18	Che and Qian 1998	Local gov ownership of firm credibly limits state predation	Mechanism: Yes,
19	LeBas 2012 (DV: non-state predation)	Whether or not the militia partners with the state, that makes it more	"organizations th
20	Berman, Felter, Kapstein, and Troland 2013 (DV: violence, mechanism they find sup)	Investment positively correlated with violence because it increases o	I don't like this ar
21			
22			
23	State regulation of industries (in a way that helps certain industries)		
24	Stigler 1971	Large firms get protection b/c of Olsonian collection action logic, they	Question: What e
25			
26	Growth		
27	Kang (David C.) Crony Capitalism: Corruption and Development in South Korea and	balance of power among a small and stable set of government and	There are these j
28	McMillan and Woodruff 2002 (The Central Role of Entrepreneurs in Transition Econo	Self-help substitutes for market-supporting institutions work for small firms, larger firms	Self-help substitutes for
29	Johnson, McMillan and Woodruff 2000 (Entrepreneurs and the ordering of institutions)	Insecure property rights	Looks at transitio
30	Bates (Prosperity and Violence)	Coercion, sometimes violent coercion, used to secure property rights	Development wh
31	Morck, Wolfenzon, and Yeung 2005	Group organization, namely when a few families have a lot of control, but not a lot inve	(Real DV: firm growth) Insider ownership increases firm value only when you start with
32	Morck et al 1998	(Real DV: firm growth) Insider ownership increases firm value only when you start with	(growth not main DV of book) predictably partial state
33	Sowell (2010)	Whether the regime is predictably or unpredictably corrupt	Even biased stat
34	Campos, Lien, and Pradhan 1999	Economic and political competition can reduce corruption, and its ad	Predictability me
35	Schleifer and Vishney 1993	Secure property rights	When multiple b
36	North and Weingast 1989	Institutions	Islamic nations h
37	Tim Kuran (The Long Divergence 2011)	In feudal Europe, secure property rights may have impeded growth because the state	Central management of state and local firms before of state
38	Bates, I think		See Mak...
39			

- Note cards (organize in different ways)

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- Task 2: Figure out your key words for searches

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- Task 2: Figure out your key words for searches
- Task 3: Start searching; aim to read the most relevant articles first

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- Keep JSTOR open on your browser

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- Task 2: Figure out your key words for searches
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- When you have 20 minutes to spare, see if you can find and skim two articles

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- This work (at least in the beginning) can be fit into small chunks of time
- Spend as much time evaluating as reading
- Slot literature review work into your schedule