

Expanding and (Re)Organizing Literature Reviews

Recognizing and Evaluating Current Patterns in your literature review:

Resources: Your own lit reviews, your peers' lit reviews, your prior knowledge about paper organizing

Reread your own +/- or your partner's lit review and

>> note the existing patterns you use to narrate, potentially including: argumentative • thematic • methodological • chronological • historic • theoretical • systematic • by publication • compare/contrast • integrative

>> quickly annotate/diagram your existing lit review using #hashtags, Venn diagrams, a source chart, arrows/flow-chart, buckets, funnel, or other pattern

Strategizing for Expanding +/- or (Re)Organizing your literature review:

Resources:

Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper: The C.A.R.S. Model "[The Introduction](#)" and "[The Literature Review](#)" research guide from USC Libraries

Funnels  versus "Strings-of-Pearls"  (Ott Memorial Writing Center) — and limitations and opportunities

Identify:

>> existing patterns that function well as overall patterns +/- or sub-section patterns—i.e., those that should be kept
>> existing patterns that need to be more transparent
>> other organizing patterns that could be used to augment/replace current organization
>> patterns to rely on as you expand your lit review over the summer, to narrate the path to and occupy your "research niche"

Update your diagram/notes to include new patterns, branches, overlaps, and assertions.

Other maybe-next-steps, take-aways, decisions:

Reread the lit reviews of 1-2 of grey or white literature sources that gave you good grounding in 1-2 of the disciplines from which you are drawing. Note the patterns those lit reviews follow. Think about how you can use those patterns as models to explain your own purposes, sources, and inquiry.

When a lit review passage is challenging to present in an order other than chronological/by publication/string-of-pearls, try using this [Article Critique](#) word-list to start re-framing.

After (re)organizing and expanding your lit review, review each subsection's pattern; ask colleagues from different disciplines to review specific subsections

Consider deliberately using [precise verbs](#) +/- or [transition words](#) to explicitly signal your shifts, decisions, and moves as a researcher and writer.

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Additional Literature Review Resources:

"[Literature Review](#)" page from New Jersey Institute of Technology (includes links to examples of stand-alone literature review articles from several fields)

"[Literature Reviews](#)" from U North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Writing Center (includes lists/explanations of organizing patterns)

"[Literature Reviews](#)" from Purdue's Online Writing Lab (introductory-level information, but includes a revision question list that might help with readability)

Basic definitions of organizing methods for lit reviews (many of these overlap)

argumentative – organizes to relay your assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the literature and research in your field

potential purpose: framing your research as an alternative narrative +/- as addressing a gap that other research overlooks, emphasize the value of your research within and beyond your niche

methodological – organizes around methodologies, and their appropriateness and processes, sometimes variables, techniques, and measurements

potential purpose: justify applying a methodology from one discipline to issue situated in another as part of new and necessary research, justify your methods for analysis

compare/contrast – juxtaposes ideas (such as theories, outcomes/results, definitions) to distinguish them from one another or to synthesize

potential purpose: point out how your research addresses improved definitions/relies on updated methods/addresses groups or ideas marginalized in your fields

theoretical – centers around definitions, theoretical frameworks, explanations, sometimes on theories' continued (in)viability and (ex)inclusiveness

potential purpose: show how the literature has or has not yet fully established theory that can assess issues in your niche

systematic -- organizes to collect and collate a full array of publications in a field (sometimes large quantities of articles) and provide an overview—especially important in state-of-the-science lit reviews

potential purpose: indicate what remains to be researched and accomplished in a field/known-unknowns in a field

integrative – organizes to synthesize so that the patterns of knowledge and investigations are apparent; inherently part of all lit reviews—especially important in state-of-the-science lit reviews

potential purpose: show how your research capitalizes on existing patterns of knowledge and research, +/- how it challenges them to create new knowledge, point out limits and gaps—including gaps that you can occupy

thematic – organizes around topics, emerging themes, ideas from specific disciplines

potential purpose: grouping to show agreement, to highlight contributions from specific fields, to manage the organization of your literature review so that it can be adjusted to accommodate new publications/findings

chronological – often organizes in a time-line order, less-often in reverse-timeline order

potential purpose: highlight how knowledge in a field was derived, to highlight how your niche contributes/adds to the progress

historic – highlights how knowledge in a field was derived

potential purpose: to show how your research is part of a larger tradition in a number of disciplines, to highlight how your niche contributes/adds to the progress

by publication – lists by source

potential purpose: show how a seminal source affects your niche, explain how different periodicals contribute to your field/research space