A literature review is a critical analysis of the relationships among different research based works that relate to your topic of interest. When you undertake a literature review you identify a research question(s) and then attempt to answer the question by searching for and analyzing the literature. We want to emphasize that literature reviews are not annotated bibliographies in which articles are merely summarized, rather, focus upon a specific topic of interest to you and how the literature review (the research) relates to your topic of interest (your work) (Wakefield, 2014).

Literature reviews may be written as stand-alone papers. They may also be an integrative part of any research thesis or dissertation. The most common form of literature reviews often appear on the first page of the research publication as almost every research article includes a section that reviews earlier related research.

Literature reviews have several purposes. They identify gaps in the literature that substantiate a reason for doing a study. They may also be used as research techniques such as systematic reviews or meta-analysis for theory development or in determining the efficacy of a therapeutic intervention (Combs, J., Bustamante, R., & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). They direct and inspire choice of methodology, the research design, and interpretation of the results of new research studies (Boell, S. K., & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). Most significant, literature reviews provide a connecting framework that establishes the importance of your research question in relation to other work (Wakefield, 2014).

HOW TO WRITE A LITERATURE REVIEW

The first step in writing a literature review is to review APA guidelines. Follow the appropriate Chamberlain resources located on E-College so that you become familiar with how to write in APA style. It is highly recommended that you pay close attention regarding how to document text citations and quotations.

The second step in writing a literature review is choosing a topic of interest to write on. Hopefully, it would be a topic of much clinical and scholarly interest to you; perhaps something that could in some way be related to your Capstone Project or Thesis/Dissertation (Pautasso, 2013).

The third step in writing a literature review is developing your research question. This is often done using the PICO format (Houser, 2012). PICO is defined as P = Patient/Population/Participants/Problem; I=Intervention; C=Comparison (not always necessary); O=Outcome. An example of a question using the PICO format might be:
“Do women (Population) who take birth-control pills (Intervention) develop breast cancer more frequently (Outcome) than women who do not take birth-control pills (Comparison group)?” Be aware the traditional PICO format does not work so well with qualitative questions. In this case, an abbreviated PICo format is recommended, in which P=Participants; I=Area of Interest; Co=Context. An example of a qualitative research question using the PICo format might be: “What is the lived experience (Context) of women (Population) with breast cancer (Area of Interest)?”

The fourth step in writing a literature review is identifying the literature you will review. It is suggested to search multiple data bases to get the best results possible. However, CINANHAL Plus Text is a popular data base site utilized at Chamberlain College of Nursing. Use key words from your topic or PICO question to conduct your search. It is important to document your search including key words used. This allows others interested in your topic to replicate your review. Be aware that you may need to redefine your topic if the topic you are reviewing is too broad. In addition, references utilized for your review should be within 5 years but there are exceptions to this rule. For example, seminal or classic articles can be cited if they are fundamental to understanding the field of study (Connelly, 2010).

Step Five is to Analyze the literature. First, do a quick review of all your articles and eliminate those that will not be helpful. Next, group your articles into topics or categories. Use concept maps or a system you prefer to take notes (Martelo, 2011). The following should be identified and would be incorporated into the composition (body) portion of your paper:

- Key terms (make sure the key concepts under study are defined for your audience);
- Primary Statistics (these are also used in your Introduction to bolster the importance of your work);
- Data or information that supports your topic;
- Useful quotes (direct quotations from the literature must be verbatim and the page number indicated. Limit quotations as the paper must primarily reflect your original work);
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in the literature (for example, small sample sizes that limit the validity of the findings or conclusions that you disagree with as an evaluator); and
- Identify any gaps in the literature as a basis for doing your study or a new study.

Step Six is to Synthesize and Begin to Write the Introduction of the literature review. Review your topic and assemble your notes. Outline your paper so you’re comfortable with its content. Begin writing by introducing your topic or argument to the reader in your Introduction. Indicate why your topic being reviewed is important and consider using statistics here to reinforce your point (Rhoades, 2011). End this section stating, “The purpose of this paper…”

Step Seven is to Develop a Clear Composition that integrates the key details of the literature review and communicates your point of view. This will be the bulk of the review. Organization of the material here is important. When organizing the body of the composition consider utilizing one of the following approaches (Wakefield, 2014);
Chronological (consider reporting your findings as a historical overview);
Methodological (consider reporting quantitative findings and then qualitative
findings or report by similar methodologies); and
Thematic (consider reporting findings by similar topic or report those works that
support your topic and then those that do not. In addition, subtopics may be
useful).

Last, write a Conclusion for the end of the review so that the path of your argument
ends with a concluding statement of some kind, or, address further research questions if
writing a thesis/dissertation. Begin this paragraph by stating, “In conclusion….”

CONCLUSION

As life time learners we all find that ideas, thoughts, and words are like stars in the sky.
Often, too numerous to totally comprehend. So too our experience with the vast and
every growing body of our human knowledge. So too our experience in sifting through a
multitude of literature to find meaning and purpose with the literature review. However,
with a careful eye and a sound critique meaningful insights are gained.

References

Literature Reviews and Literature Searches. Communications of The
Association for Information Systems, 34257-286.

Combs, J., Bustamante, R., & Onwuegbuzie, A. (2010). An interactive model for
facilitating development of literature reviews. International Journal of Multiple
Research Approaches, 4(2), 159-182. doi:10.5172/mra.2010.4.2.159


**Resources**

**Samples of Literature Reviews**
