

Chapter 9

Guidelines for Writing a First Draft

Up to this point, you have searched for literature on the topic of your review, made careful notes on specific details of the literature, and analyzed these details to identify patterns, relationships among studies, and gaps in the body of literature, as well as strengths and weaknesses in particular research studies. Then, in Chapter 8, you reorganized your notes and developed a detailed writing outline as you prepared to write your literature review.

In other words, you have already completed the most difficult steps in the writing process: the analysis and synthesis of the literature and the charting of the course of your argument. These preliminary steps constitute the intellectual process of preparing a literature review. The remaining steps—drafting, editing, and redrafting—will now require you to translate the results of your intellectual labor into a narrative account of what you have found.

The guidelines in this chapter will help you to produce a first draft of your literature review. The guidelines in Chapter 10 will help you to develop a coherent essay and avoid producing a series of annotations, and Chapter 11 presents additional guidelines that relate to style, mechanics, and language usage.

✓ **Guideline 1: Begin by identifying the broad problem area, but avoid global statements.**

Usually, the introduction of a literature review should begin with the identification of the broad problem area under review. The rule of thumb is, “Go from the general to the specific.” However, there are limits on how general to be in the beginning. Consider Example 9.1.1. As the beginning of a literature review on a topic in higher education, it is much too broad. It fails to identify any particular area or topic. You should avoid starting your review with such global statements.

Example 9.1.1

Beginning of a literature review in education that is too broad:

Higher education is important to both the economy of the United States and to the rest of the world. Without a college education, students will be unprepared for the many advances that will take place in this millennium.

Contrast Example 9.1.1 with Example 9.1.2, which is also on a topic in education but clearly relates to the specific topic that will be reviewed: reduction of alcohol consumption by undergraduates.

Example 9.1.2¹

Beginning of a literature review on education that is sufficiently specific:

[The] high rate of alcohol-related crimes, accidents, and other problem behaviors on college campuses has led school administrators to implement a range of initiatives designed to reduce undergraduate drinking (Abbey, 1991; Scott, Schafer, & Greenfield, 1999...).

✓ **Guideline 2: Early in the review, indicate why the topic being reviewed is important.**

As early as the first paragraph in a literature review, it is desirable to indicate why the topic is important. The authors of Example 9.2.1 have done this by pointing out that their topic deals with a life-or-death issue.

Example 9.2.1²

Beginning of a literature review indicating the importance of the topic:

Considering that more than 48,762 people have died while waiting for an organ transplant in the United States from 1993 through 2002, the need to increase the number of available organs is not difficult to defend (Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS]...2004). Furthermore, although the number of individuals on the organ waiting list in 1993 was 33,014, the number of men, women, and children awaiting a life-saving transplant procedure was 80,000 at the start of 2003 (DHHS et al., 2004). Moreover....

Of course, not all issues are of as much universal importance as the one in Example 9.2.1. Nevertheless, the topic of the review should be of importance to some group(s), and this should be pointed out, as in Example 9.2.2, which establishes the importance of understanding how educators' attitudes on dyslexia affect students.

Example 9.2.2³

Beginning of the second paragraph of a literature review in which the importance of the topic for students with dyslexia is pointed out:

Students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia (reading disability) report that the attitudes of educators profoundly affect the way they perceive themselves as well as their success in school and life (Helendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000...).

¹ Novak, K. B., & Crawford, L. A. (2001). Perceived drinking norms, attention to social comparison information, and alcohol use among college students. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education, 46*, 18–32.

² Siegel, J. T., Alvaro, E. M., & Jones, S. P. (2005). Organ donor registration preferences among Hispanic populations: Which modes of registration have the greatest promise? *Health Education & Behavior, 32*, 242–252.

³ Wadlington, E. M., & Wadlington, P. L. (2005). What educators really believe about dyslexia. *Reading Improvement, 42*, 16–33.

✓ **Guideline 3: Distinguish between research findings and other sources of information.**

If you describe points of view that are based on anecdotal evidence or personal opinions rather than on research, indicate the nature of the source. For instance, the three statements in Example 9.3.1 contain key words (e.g., “speculated”), which indicate that the material is based on personal points of view (not research).

Example 9.3.1

Beginnings of statements that indicate that the material that follows is based on personal points of view (not research):

“Doe (2004) speculated that....”

“It has been suggested that.... (Smith, 2004).”

“Black (2004) related a personal experience, which indicated that....”

Contrast the statements in Example 9.3.1 with those in Example 9.3.2, which are for introducing research-based findings in a literature review.

Example 9.3.2

Beginnings of statements that indicate that the material that follows is based on research:

“In a statewide survey, Jones (2004) found that....”

“Hill’s (2004) research in urban classrooms suggests that....”

“Recent findings indicate that... (Barnes, 2003; Hanks, 2004).”

If there is little research on a topic, you may find it necessary to review primarily literature that expresses only opinions (without a research base). When this is the case, consider making a general statement to indicate this situation before discussing the literature in more detail in your review. This technique is indicated in Example 9.3.3.

Example 9.3.3⁴

Statement indicating a lack of research:

...the *ERIC* database contains... more than 500 *ERIC* documents, journal articles, and monographs devoted to the topic of block scheduling. However, only 10 of those documents focus on block scheduling in the context of the school media center, and none report findings based on designed research studies....

Of the reports that do exist, most are anecdotal in nature. Lincoln (1999), Ready (1999), and Richmond (1999) all give their personal experiences with the impact of block scheduling on their library media centers. Each one discusses....

⁴ Huffman, S., Thurman, G., & Thomas, L. K. (2005). An investigation of block scheduling and school library media centers. *Reading Improvement*, 42, 3–15.

✓ **Guideline 4: Indicate why certain studies are important.**

If you believe a particular study is important, state clearly why you think so. For instance, the authors of Example 9.4.1 identify a study as “one of the largest studies in the field,” thereby indicating its importance.

Example 9.4.1⁵

States why a study is important (in this case, “one of the largest studies”):

Big Brothers/Big Sisters may be the best-known volunteer mentoring program in the United States, matching at-risk youth with adult mentors. In one of the largest studies in the field (Tierney & Grossman, 1995), 995 youth who asked to be matched with a Big Brother/Big Sister during 1992–1993 were randomly assigned to one of two groups: a mentoring group or a control group (the latter youth were put on the 18-month waiting list). Both groups were interviewed....

A study may also be important because it represents a pivotal point in the development of an area of research, such as a research article that indicates a reversal of a prominent researcher’s position or one that launched a new methodology. These and other characteristics of a study may justify its status as important. When a study is especially important, make sure your review makes this clear to the reader.

✓ **Guideline 5: If you are commenting on the timeliness of a topic, be specific in describing the time frame.**

Avoid beginning your review with unspecific references to the timeliness of a topic, as in, “In recent years, there has been an increased interest in....” This beginning would leave many questions unanswered for the reader, such as: What years are being referenced? How did the writer determine that the “interest” is increasing? Who has become more interested, the writer or others in the field? Is it possible that the writer became interested in the topic recently while others have been losing interest?

Likewise, an increase in a problem or an increase in the size of a population of interest should be specific in terms of numbers or percentages and the specific years being referred to. For instance, it is not very informative to state only that “The number of people of Hispanic origin probably will increase in the future.” The authors of Example 9.5.1 avoided this problem by being specific in citing percentages and the time frame (italics and bold are added for emphasis).

Example 9.5.1⁶

Names a specific timeline:

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001), there are an estimated 32.8 million people of Hispanic origin living in the United States. Projections indicate this

⁵ Keating, L. M., Tomishima, M. A., Foster, S., & Alessandri, M. (2002). The effects of a mentoring program on at-risk youth. *Adolescence*, 37, 717–734.

⁶ Sharma, P., & Kerl, S. B. (2002). Suggestions for psychologists working with Mexican American individuals and families in health care settings. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 47, 230–239.

number *will increase from about 10% of the U.S. population in 1990 to 14% or 15% by the year 2020*, making this group one of the four largest ethnic groups in this country (Garcia & Marotta, 1997). Baruth and Manning (1999) wrote that Mexican Americans accounted for 61% of the total Hispanic population. Approximately half of the...

✓ **Guideline 6: If citing a classic or landmark study, identify it as such.**

Make sure that you identify the classic or landmark studies in your review. Such studies are often pivotal points in the historical development of the published literature. In addition, they are often responsible for framing a particular question or a research tradition, and they also may be the original source of key concepts or terminology used in the subsequent literature. Whatever their contribution, you should identify their status as classics or landmarks in the literature. Consider Example 9.6.1, in which a landmark (first of its kind) study is cited.

Example 9.6.1⁷

Identifies a landmark study:

The *first content analysis* (emphasis added) of gender biases in magazine advertisements was published by Courtney and Lockeretz (1971). Those authors found that magazine advertisements reflected four general stereotypes: (1) "A woman's place is in the home," (2) "Women do not make important decisions or do important things," (3) "Women are dependent and need men's protection," and (4) "Men regard women primarily as sex objects; they are not interested in women as people."

✓ **Guideline 7: If a landmark study was replicated, mention that and indicate the results of the replication.**

As noted in the previous guideline, landmark studies typically stimulate additional research. In fact, many are replicated a number of times, using different groups of participants or by adjusting other research design variables. If you are citing a landmark study and it has been replicated, you should mention that fact and indicate whether the replications were successful. This is illustrated in Example 9.7.1, which is an elaboration on Example 9.6.1.

Example 9.7.1

Points at replications:

Since the time of this study, a number of *other content analyses have replicated these results* (emphasis added) (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Busby & Leichy, 1993; Culley & Bennett, 1976; England, Kuhn, & Gardner, 1983; Lysonski, 1983; Sexton & Haberman, 1974; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975; Wagner & Banos, 1973).

⁷ Neptune, D., & Plous, S. (1997). Racial and gender biases in magazine advertising. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21, 627-644.

During the past 40 years, only one of the stereotypes found by Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) has shown evidence of amelioration: the image of women as homebound. As women have entered the workforce in growing numbers, advertisements have increasingly shown them in work settings outside the home (Busby & Leichty, 1993; Sullivan & O'Connor, 1988).

✓ **Guideline 8: Discuss other literature reviews on your topic.**

If you find an earlier published review on your topic, it is important to discuss it in your review. Before doing so, consider the following questions:

How is the other review different from yours?

Is yours substantially more current?

Did you delimit the topic in a different way?

Did you conduct a more comprehensive review?

Did the earlier reviewer reach the same major conclusions that you reached?

Did you reach the same major conclusions as the earlier reviewer?

How worthy is the other review of your readers' attention?

What will they gain, if anything, by reading it?

Will they encounter a different and potentially helpful perspective on the problem area?

What are its major strengths and weaknesses?

✓ **Guideline 9: Refer the reader to other reviews on issues that you will not be discussing in detail.**

If you find it necessary to refer to a *related issue* that cannot be covered in depth in your review, it is appropriate to refer the reader to other reviews, as in Example 9.9.1. Needless to say, your review should completely cover the specific topic you have chosen. It is not acceptable to describe just a portion of the literature on your topic (as you defined it) and then refer the reader to another source for the remainder. However, the technique illustrated in Example 9.9.1 can be useful for pointing out literature that may be of interest to the reader but will not be reviewed in detail in the review you are writing (italics and bold are added for emphasis).

Example 9.9.1⁸

Refers readers to other sources for details:

Throughout the 20th century, interest in the psychological impact of trauma has peaked during and after wartime, with the first major study of combat-related psychological sequelae (then called *physioneurosis*) published in 1941 by A. Kardiner (*see Kolb, 1993, for a more detailed accounting*). Dealing with survivors of World War II prisoner-of-war camps brought some insight....

⁸ Ozer, E. J., Best, S. R., Lipsey, T. L., & Weiss, D. S. (2003). Predictors of posttraumatic stress disorder and symptoms in adults: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*, 52–73.

✓ **Guideline 10: Justify comments such as “no studies were found.”**

If you find a gap in the literature that deserves mention in your literature review, explain how you arrived at the conclusion that there is a gap. At the very least, explain how you conducted the literature search, which databases you searched, and the dates and other parameters you used. You do not need to be overly specific, but the reader will expect you to justify your statement about the gap.

To avoid misleading your reader, it is a good idea early in your review to make statements such as the one shown in Example 9.10.1. This will protect you from criticism if you point out a gap when one does not actually exist. In other words, you are telling your reader that there is a gap as determined by the use of *a particular search strategy*.

Example 9.10.1⁹

Describes the strategy for searching literature:

We used five methods to locate relevant studies. First, we reviewed reference lists from previously published reviews of self-concept development (Demo, 1992; Harter, 1982, 1998; Wylie, 1979) and from two recent meta-analyses of gender differences in self-esteem (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999; Major, Barr, Zubek, & Babey, 1999). Second, we searched the *PsycINFO* and *ERIC* databases for articles published between 1887 (the earliest entry in the *PsycINFO* database) and June 2002, using the keyword “self-esteem” paired with each of the following keywords: “age differences,” “change,” “consistency,” “continuity,” “development,” “literature review,” “longitudinal,” “meta-analysis,” and “stability.” Third, we paired the keyword “self-esteem” with every journal title that contained a previously identified article (from the keyword search). Fourth, we searched *PsycINFO* using the names of common self-esteem scales as the keywords (e.g., Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Self-Esteem Inventory, Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale). These keyword searches resulted in 9,410 citations (7,150 were from peer-reviewed journals). Fifth, we searched for relevant articles by reviewing the reference lists of the articles identified in the *PsycINFO* and *ERIC* searches that met the inclusion criteria.

✓ **Guideline 11: Avoid long lists of nonspecific references.**

In academic writing, references are used in the text of a written document for at least two purposes. First, they are used to give proper credit to an author of an idea or, in the case of a direct quotation, of a specific set of words. A failure to do so would constitute plagiarism. Second, references are used to demonstrate the breadth of coverage given in a manuscript. In an introductory paragraph, for example, it may be desirable to include references to several key studies that will be discussed in more detail in the body of the review. However, it is inadvisable to use long lists of references that do not specifically relate to the point being expressed. For instance, in Example 9.11.1, the long list of nonspecific references in the first sentence is probably inappropriate. Are these all empirical

⁹ Trzesniewski, K. H., Donnellan, M. B., & Robins, R. W. (2003). Stability of self-esteem across the life span. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 205–220.

studies? Do they report their authors' speculations on the issue? Are some of the references more important than others? It would have been better for the authors to refer the reader to a few key studies, which themselves would contain references to additional examples of research in that particular area, as illustrated in Example 9.11.2.

Example 9.11.1

First sentence in a literature review (too many nonspecific references):

Numerous writers have indicated that children in single-parent households are at greater risk for academic underachievement than children from two-parent households (Adams, 1999; Block, 2002; Doe, 2004; Edgar, 2000; Hampton, 1995; Jones, 2003; Klinger, 1991; Long, 1992; Livingston, 1993; Macy, 1985; Norton, 1988; Pearl, 1994; Smith, 1996; Travers, 1997; Vincent, 1994; West, 1992; West-erly, 1995; Yardley, 2004).

Example 9.11.2

An improved version of Example 9.11.1:

Numerous writers have suggested that children in single-parent households are at greater risk for academic underachievement than children from two-parent households (e.g., see Adams, 1999, and Block, 2002). Three recent studies have provided strong empirical support for this contention (Doe, 2004; Edgar, 2000; Jones, 2003). Of these, the study by Jones is the strongest, employing a national sample with rigorous controls for....

Notice the use of "e.g., see..." which indicates that only some of the possible references are cited for the point that the writers "have suggested." You may also use the Latin abbreviation *cf.* (which means "compare").

✓ **Guideline 12: If the results of previous studies are inconsistent or widely varying, cite them separately.**

It is not uncommon for studies on the same topic to produce inconsistent or widely varying results. If so, it is important to cite the studies separately in order for the reader to interpret your review correctly. The following two examples illustrate the potential problem. Example 9.12.1 is misleading because it fails to note that the previous studies are grouped according to the two extremes of the percentage range given. Example 9.12.2 illustrates a better way to cite inconsistent findings.

Example 9.12.1

Inconsistent results cited as a single finding (undesirable):

In previous studies (Doe, 2004; Jones, 2005), parental support for requiring students to wear school uniforms in public schools varied considerably, ranging from only 19% to 52%.

Example 9.12.2

Improved version of Example 9.12.1:

In previous studies, parental support for requiring students to wear school uniforms has varied considerably. Support from rural parents varied from only 19% to 28% (Doe, 2004) while support from suburban parents varied from 35% to 52% (Jones, 2005).

✓ **Guideline 13: Cite all relevant references in the review section of a thesis, dissertation, or journal article.**

When writing a thesis, a dissertation, or an article for publication in which the literature review precedes a report of original research, you should usually first cite all the relevant references in the literature review of your document. Avoid introducing new references to literature in later sections, such as the results or discussion sections. Make sure you have checked your entire document to ensure that the literature review section or chapter is comprehensive. You may refer back to a previous discussion of a pertinent study when discussing your conclusions, but the study should have been referenced first in the literature review at the beginning of the thesis, dissertation, or article.

✓ **Guideline 14: Emphasize the need for your study in the literature review section or chapter.**

When writing a thesis, a dissertation, or an article for publication in which the literature review precedes a report of original research, you should use the review to help justify your study. You can do this in a variety of ways, such as pointing out that your study (1) closes a gap in the literature, (2) tests an important aspect of a current theory, (3) replicates an important study, (4) retests a hypothesis using new or improved methodological procedures, (5) is designed to resolve conflicts in the literature, and so on.

Example 9.14.1 was included in the literature review portion of a research report designed to explore the relationship between self-reported marijuana use and opinions on drug testing and treatment programs. In their review, the authors point out gaps in the literature and indicate how their study fills them. This is a strong justification for the study.

Example 9.14.1¹⁰

Justifies a study:

The present study fills these three gaps. First, this study focuses on reactions to organizational drug treatment programs. Specifically, we considered issues such as job safety sensitivity, drug use, and type of treatment program. Second, we focused specifically on the relationship of...

¹⁰ Paronto, M. E., Truxillo, D. M., Talya, N. B., & Leo, M. C. (2002). Drug testing, drug treatment, and marijuana use: A fairness perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87, 1159–1166.