

# Review of the Literature

**NOTE:** *Not intended to be all-encompassing, but a general overview of the literature search process.*

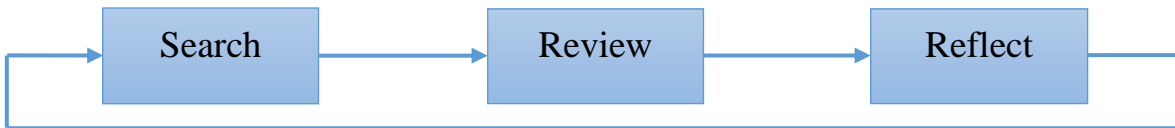
An important aspect of research is gaining significant knowledge of your area of interest. It's important to develop a thorough knowledge of current research, theories, and associated models that are relevant to your area of interest. This knowledge is obtained through an exhaustive review of existing literature. The following steps provide a road map to building this important knowledgebase and ultimately selecting your topic.

1. ***List current questions*** and thoughts. In exploring research interests, consider the process of free association. This is a process where you write down any thoughts that come to mind when thinking about your interests. Once these interests are documented, talk with faculty and colleagues to further develop your topics. By the end of this step, you may have several interests. Finalize this step with statements of interests (statements may be very broad).
  - a. Example statements:
    - i. How does stress impact GI issues?
    - ii. How does one surgical technique differ from another technique?
    - iii. How does mindfulness meditation influence wellbeing?
    - iv. How does exercise impact cognitive function?
2. ***Create a list of keywords*** that will enable you to explore the existing literature relative to these initial questions. This is a nonlinear process as you may change directions as you build your knowledge of the topic.
  - a. Examples of keywords for cognition; memory, recall, thought, reasoning, perception, intellect, awareness, and cognizance,
3. ***Select appropriate interdisciplinary search engines*** and databases to conduct your search. Consider your topic when selecting databases. For example, PsycINFO for the social sciences, ERIC for educational research, and MEDLINE / PubMed for biomedical research. Be mindful that your interests may be found in multiple databases.



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4. *The process flow* should be as follows:



As the figure illustrates, the process begins with a search of the literature, then followed by a review of the literature. The third step is very important which involves a reflection of what you've read. This step may include summarizing your notes, comparison to current theories and models, and also discussions with faculty and others that could provide added insight. As you repeat this process, your search should become more focused (narrowing the scope of your topic).

5. *Organize the results* of your search. Be sure to appropriately document important aspects of relevant articles. Commonly used criteria for analyzing and coding information is as follows (you may choose to code all these issues, or a select few):

- a. Full, typically APA-style citation
- b. Research questions
- c. Type of research design: prospective, retrospective, between-groups, etc.
- d. Dependent and independent variables
- e. Major hypotheses
- f. Sample size, and participant demographics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, etc.)
- g. Measures used in the article to assess the constructs in the study
- h. Primary findings
- i. Methodological issues, concerns, limitations
- j. Ideas that came to mind while reading the article
- k. New references to examine (note authors who have been referenced multiple times)
- l. Suggestions the researchers had for future studies

**While the documentation of current literature is time consuming, appropriate collection of information will save considerable time as you progress through the research process.**

## References & Further Readings

Heppner, P. P., & Heppner, M. J. (2004). *Writing and publishing your thesis, dissertation, and research: A guide for students in the helping professions*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Brooks/Cole.

Prokscha, S. (2011). *Practical guide to clinical data management*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Szuchman, L. T. (2013). *Writing with style: APA style made easy*. Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning.

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