

Connecting the Dots: Conducting Literature Reviews

with Dr. Scott Lancaster

Learn useful tips and strategies to get started with your literature review for a dissertation, thesis, or article.

WHEN: Tuesday, October 13, 2020 2 pm – 3 pm

WHERE: Virtual





Waters Library Workshop Series Presents

Connecting the Dots: Conducting Literature Reviews

This workshop will provide you with useful tips and strategies to get started with your literature review for a dissertation, thesis, or article.

Topics Include:

- The purpose of a literature review and the types of literature reviews
 - Selecting resources, identifying keywords, and developing search strategies
 - Evaluating sources, organizing your material, and keeping up to date
 - Writing a literature review
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What is a Literature Review?

A literature review is a synthesis (not a summary) of previous work in a specific area. It should bring together different aspects of the literature in that area and create something new with it.

The result is a critical evaluation of the current theory and methods of a particular topic reflecting what is known, how it is known, and what is unknown.

What is the objective of a Literature Review?

The objective of the literature review is to provide the reader with the knowledge needed to understand your research project.

It is not an explanation of everything you know about a particular subject.

Because of this distinction, you need to first perform a thorough investigation of the literature, and then synthesize only the material relevant to your research question.

Entering the Research Conversation

- Choosing a general thesis or dissertation topic is relatively easy.
- Deciding on specific and realistic research questions requires significant thought and extensive inquiry.
- Appropriate and relevant research questions and the methods employed to answer them must be framed in the context of existing research.

The Burkean Parlor

The Burkean Parlor is a metaphor introduced by Kenneth Burke in 1973 that compares the collaborative effort that makes up scholarly communication as an unending conversation.



(Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* 3rd ed. 1941. Univ. of California Press, 1973)

<https://youtu.be/faaQuZQkRZQ>

Burke's Metaphor for the “Unending Conversation”

"Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress."

(Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* 3rd ed. 1941. Univ. of California Press, 1973)



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Goals of a Literature Review

Through the process of creating a literature review, you should:

- Refine the scope of your research
- Rationalize the significance of the research problem
- Distinguish what has been done from what needs to be done
- Discover important relevant variables
- Relate ideas and theories to applications
- Avoid fruitless approaches
- Place your research in a historical context



You will typically write two versions of your literature review during the research process.

- The first is a comprehensive review of the literature with the objective of teaching yourself what is known about your interest area. The goal is to broadly learn what has been done and what needs to be done. Your research questions emerge from this first stage.
- The second is a focused review of the literature with the objective to inform the reader about what is known and unknown in your research area, drawn from a narrower set of literature based on the research questions developed.



How long should a Literature Review be?

Writing and deciding the scope of the literature review is complicated. Students may ask how many articles they should cite, and how many pages they should write. That depends.

General guidelines suggest that five to ten reference articles is probably not enough, but more than 200 is probably too many.

Likewise, one to two pages is not enough but more than 50 is probably too many.

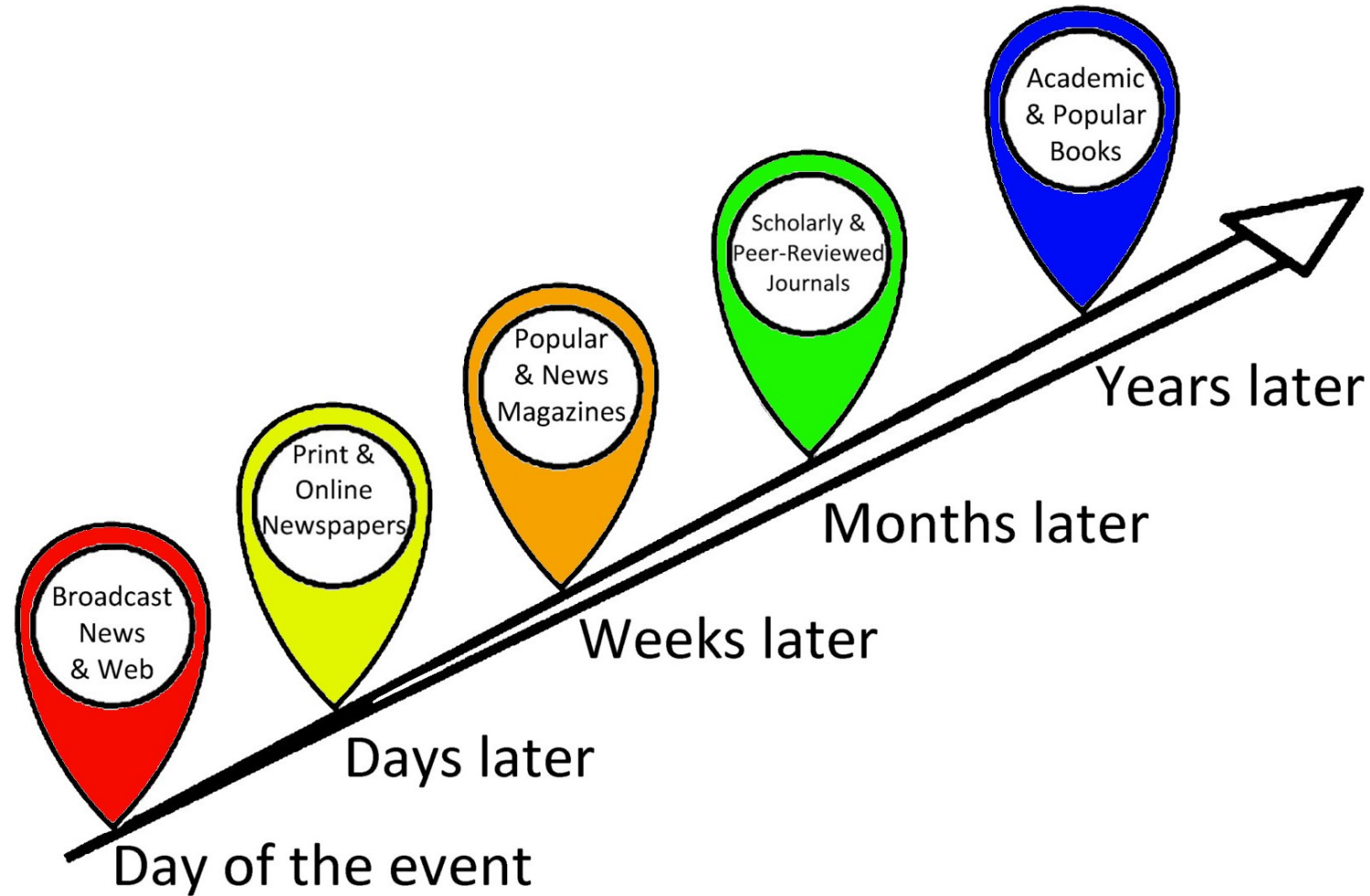
Preparing to Write a Literature Review

- A useful first step when starting your dissertation is to identify relevant keywords to help navigate through your existing literature. When researching for information, remember to give preference to primary research.
- Using these keywords, perform an initial search of the literature using one of the citation databases.
- Create an initial bibliography of 10 to 20 articles
- Then create a broader bibliography of 50 to 80 articles

Types of Sources

- Primary Sources: immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic, such as documents (in history), a text (in literary studies), survey data (in social sciences), or reports of original research (in natural sciences)
- Secondary Sources: books, articles or reports that are based on primary sources, such as peer-reviewed articles and scholarly books
- Tertiary Sources: synthesis of secondary sources for the general reader, such as textbooks, encyclopedias, and mass market publication

The Publication Cycle

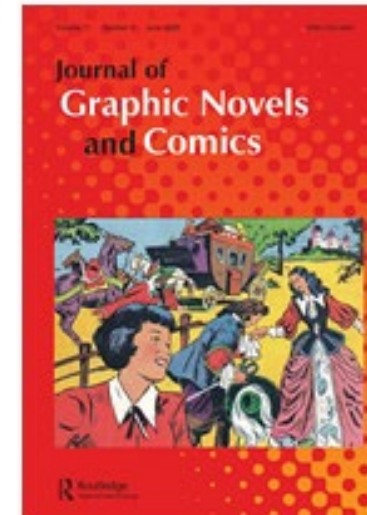


Degree of Scholarship in Periodicals



Generally you should give more weight to sources that are scholarly.

Popular



Scholarly



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Use of Sources

- Secondary sources should be relied on if you are making a scholarly argument because they make up the “conversation” in which you are seeking to participate.
- Tertiary sources can help you get a feel for a topic. They may be written by distinguished scholars, but they are limited in scope. Because they are intended for a broad audience who may be unfamiliar with the topics that they address they tend to oversimplify the research.



Where are the books?



Cincinnati Public Library, 1874. www.theparisreview.tumblr.com.



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Using the 21st Century Library

The library offers systematic and productive methods for discovering useful and credible sources.

Before you can use sources, you must first learn to find and evaluate them. Some materials that will eventually serve as sources may be physically located in the library, but others are likely to be located elsewhere, whether a physical or virtual space.

The library is a portal to these sources. You can rely on the research expertise of librarians to find relevant material.

Exploring Online Databases

Along with books, online databases are a valuable asset of the library. Like journals, databases are subscription items, and each library's subscriptions will differ based on local need and resources. Some databases are general while others are specific. You should become familiar with the major databases in your field to which the library subscribes, and you should learn how to use them.



The Research Process

Remember that the research process is not linear. In the past researchers often browsed the shelves to find similar books. Finding an article can lead forward or backward to the articles it cites or the ones that cite it. You will also find subject terms related to articles you find that will be useful in future searches.

Using the Internet for Academic Research

- Get your bearings with respect to a new topic, regarding everything you learn as provisional
- Explore potential keywords to use in a more systematic search
- Remind yourself of dates or facts, but checking against more reliable sources
- Locate the authors of sources whom you might wish to contact.
- Google Scholar can find some material not indexed in databases

Avoid Common Mistakes

- Not employing the best keywords and identifying the best sources
- Not relating your study's findings to the findings of the literature review
- Relying on secondary rather than primary sources, or tertiary rather than secondary sources
- Blindly accepting other researchers' findings rather than critically examining them



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