

LS 502: Research Methods
Summer Session 2, 2010
Class 1, Thursday July 8, 2010
Due Thursday July 15 at 6:00 p.m.

Evaluating Research

A researcher must be able to review the work of other researchers in his or her field and to evaluate the quality of their methods, results, and conclusions. Some research reports make this relatively easy; others are more difficult. Developing the ability to evaluate the work of others in your field will facilitate the development of your own research ideas, and provide direction for ways in which your work can be enhanced.

The process of critically reading and evaluating research materials is like exercising a muscle. You become better with practice.

In this exercise, **you will locate two research articles discussing the same topic from two different journals**. One journal will be a practitioner-oriented journal, designed for a broad readership such as Library Journal or American Libraries. Others are listed below. The other will be from a scholarly journal of your choosing.

The articles you choose should focus on the topic you have chosen to pursue during this course. You will be moving from this assignment to larger and more complex assignments focusing on the same topic.

You will describe your findings following the set of questions below. Please note that not all of the questions may be relevant to all articles.

You will answer the questions in 2-4 sentences. You may also use bulleted points.

Practitioner-oriented / Broad Readership (You are not restricted to the titles on this list.)

Library Journal / American Libraries / Against the Grain / The Unabashed Librarian

Scholarly / Specialized (You are not restricted to the titles on this list.)

College & Research Libraries / Journal of Academic Librarianship / Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology / Library Resources & Technical Services / Library Quarterly / Library Trends / Reference & User Services Quarterly /

1. First, note the presence of absence of graphical elements in the two articles. Which article has been designed using color and graphics, and which has not.

2. Does the scholarly article indicate clearly if it was peer-reviewed? How can you learn about this?

3. Do the articles contain clearly-stated hypotheses or research questions? How can you determine the focus of the author/authors' work?
4. Do the articles relate the author/authors' own processes of data collection, describe and synthesize other research in the area, or both?
5. Are the articles logically organized? Do you note any elements that could have improved their organization?
6. If a data collection process is described, can you form an opinion about how well or thoroughly this was done? Are there additional steps you would have taken?
7. Can you form an opinion about the interpretation of the results?
8. Finally, think about the articles taken a whole. What elements seem most important to you, or are most interesting? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Will you find them useful for your future work? Why or why not?

Exercise 2

Annotated Bibliography

Due Thursday July 22

What is the purpose of this assignment?

An annotated bibliography is a list of resources supplemented by short descriptions and brief evaluations. It provides specific information about each source you are planning to use in a research paper. It may also include materials that you regard as flawed or otherwise unsatisfactory. The annotated bibliography is a useful prelude to the more detailed literature review.

As researchers, you are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about your topics, and are developing the ability to describe your resources and evaluate their quality and usefulness. The scholarly communication process is an extended conversation with others in the field.

The construction of an annotated bibliography is one of the first steps in the process of demonstrating to others in your field that you have performed the research necessary to support your research. The annotated bibliography also performs a service to readers by providing them with information about sources on a specific subject.

We have a precedent for this kind of activity. Think about the process of writing descriptive lists of your favorite movies or books. You want to give your readers insight into the elements of the movies or books you're describing. This activity includes both their basic features (authors, directors, precedents, plots) and brief accounts of your own observations

You may use any style guide of your choosing to format your entries: Turabian, MLA, or APA.

Instructions

The following sample is taken from the Memorial University of Newfoundland Libraries website (http://www.library.mun.ca/guides/howto/annotated_bibl.php). There are two types of annotations on this page. You will follow the sample for the Informative/Descriptive Annotation. Please read the section titled "What an Annotation Should Include" on the web page. Your annotation should include an evaluation of why the work is relevant and useful for your research.

London, Herbert. "Five Myths of the Television Age." *Television Quarterly* 10 (1) Spring 1982: 81-89.

Herbert London, the Dean of Journalism at New York University and author of several books and articles, explains how television contradicts five commonly believed ideas. He uses specific examples of events seen on television, such as the assassination of John Kennedy, to illustrate his points. His examples have been selected to contradict such truisms as: "seeing is believing";

"a picture is worth a thousand words"; and "satisfaction is its own reward." London uses logical arguments to support his ideas which are his personal opinion. He doesn't refer to any previous works on the topic. London's style and vocabulary would make the article of interest to any reader. **NOTE: Include a statement about why the resource is relevant to your research.**

(Source: http://www.library.mun.ca/guides/howto/annotated_bibl.php).

There must be at least eight items in your final product. You will be using these resources in your next assignment, the literature review.

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Exercise 3

The Literature Review

Due Thursday July 29

Carefully review the following readings:

Creswell, Research Design Chapter 2

Katzer, Evaluating Research pps. 85-89 (Chapter 8)

Powell and Connaway, Basic Research Methods for Librarians pps. 255-257

See: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/libr/tut/litrev/thelitrev.html>

The Role of the Literature Review

Research reports, master's theses, dissertations, and many research articles typically include a section, even an entire chapter, reviewing the related literature. The review describes theoretical perspectives and previous research findings regarding the problem at hand. Its function is to "look again" (re + view) at what others have done in areas that are similar, though not necessarily identical to, one's own area of investigation.

Format

A literature review is a prose document similar to a journal article or essay. It is not a list of citations and descriptions. Your literature review should be 8-10 pages long. You will use an Arial 10-point or Times New Roman 12-point font, with 1-inch margins on all sides. The paper must be double-spaced. Your material must be cited using your preferred citation method.

Literature reviews should should contain the following elements:

- A thesis or statement of purpose.
- A bibliography of every resource you discuss or refer to at the end of the document. **This list does not count in your 8-10 page quota.**
- An overview of the subject, issue or theory under consideration, along with the objectives of the literature review
- A division of works under review into categories (e.g. those in support of a particular position, those against, and those offering alternative theses)
- Explanations about how each work is similar to and different from the others
- Evaluative statements about the quality and usefulness of each work for your subject

In assessing each work, you should be considering the following:

- What are the author's credentials?
- Are the author's arguments supported by evidence? Look, for example, for case studies, narratives, statistics, recent study finding.
- Objectivity. Does the author's perspective seem even-handed? Is contrary data considered?
- Persuasiveness. Which of the author's theses are most/least convincing?
- Areas for further research.

Citation Style

You may use any citation style you wish: Turabian, MLA, APA, etc.