Purpose of the Literature Review

- “A substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research.” – Boote and Beile, 2005
- “you join[ing] the conversation –first by listening to what is being said and then formulating a comment designed to advance the dialogue.” – Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008
What a Literature Review IS

- Develops your understanding of the literature in a field of study
- A synthesis
- A critical analysis and narrative
- Current (and historical if necessary)
- Defined by a guiding concept
What a Literature Review CAN BE

- Part of a larger research study (like a thesis or dissertation), the literature review...
  - Sets the broad context of the study
  - Sets the scope of the study
  - Justifies the scope and context of the study
  - Establishes the theoretical framework
  - Justifies the methodology of the study
  - Makes an argument
What a Literature Review CAN BE

- A standalone assignment for a class
- Part of the introduction to a paper for a class or a journal article
- A full article published in an academic journal
- Basic or advanced
What a Literature Review is NOT

- It is not an annotated bibliography
- It is not just a descriptive list
- It is not a basic summative report of what you've read on the topic – you need to be saying something
What a Literature Review Must Do

- Be ORGANIZED around your thesis statement or research question(s)
- SYNTHESIZE results into a summary of what is known and not know on your topic
- Identify areas of CONTROVERSY
- Formulate questions for FURTHER RESEARCH
A Few Considerations

- If your literature review is part of an original research study, read about your chosen methodology to determine when you should review the literature.
  - For some methods, the literature should be reviewed before, during, or after data collection.
The Literature Review Process

From *The Literature Review* (2009) by Machi and McEvoy
Select a Topic

- Read your assignment carefully!
  - Ask for clarification from professor
- Talk over your ideas with someone
- Scan academic journals
- Read professional blogs and listservs
- Look for Research Agendas on professional association websites
- Focus your topic
Search the Literature

- Types of sources that can be included:
  - Books, Articles, Abstracts, Reviews, Dissertations and theses, Research reports, Websites, Films, Etc.

- Identify the most important / useful databases for your discipline

- Develop an understanding of the academic terminology for your field of study

- Determine time frame
Search the Literature

- Look for empirical and theoretical literature
- Include primary and secondary sources
- Identify classic or seminal studies
- Identify important authors who are contributing to the development of your topic
- Use a system to organize and manage material
  - From the very beginning
  - RefWorks or other bibliographic management software

- Graduate Research and RefWorks Workshops available at UNT Libraries!
Develop your Argument

- This step is a planning step – you will develop these arguments in the next two steps: surveying and critiquing the literature

- “you must build a case for what is known about your topic and determine how this knowledge addresses the research question.” – Machi and McEvoy, 2009

- Develop two types of arguments:
  - Argument of discovery – develop findings that present the current state of knowledge about your research interest
  - Argument of advocacy – analyze and critique the knowledge gained from developing the argument of discovery to answer the research question
Develop your Argument

- Analyze the claims within the literature to develop your arguments
- Claim – the argument’s declaration or assertion
- Evidence – data that define and support the claim
- Types of claims
  - Fact
  - Worth
  - Policy
  - Concept
  - Interpretation
- You must present all sides of a question; your argument must be balanced
Survey and Critique the Literature

- Develops the discovery argument and the advocacy argument
- Answers the questions:
  - “What do we know about the subject of our study?”
  - “Based on what we know, what conclusions can we draw about the research question?”
- Critically assess each piece of literature you have gathered to analyze its content
- You need to be:
  - Methodical
  - Systematic
  - Rigorous
  - Consistent
Stage 1: Skim and Read

- Skim first – note topic, structure, general reasoning, data, and bibliographical references
- Go back and skim the prefaced and introduction, trying to identify main ideas contained in the work
- Identify key parts of the article or key chapters in books
Survey and Critique the Literature

Stage 2: Highlight and Extract Key Elements

- Trying to understand historical context and current state
- Identify themes, trends, patterns
- Also looking for gaps and anomalies

Key questions to ask of the literature:

- What are the origins and definitions of the topic?
- What are the key theories, concepts, and ideas?
- What are the major debates, arguments, and issues?
- What are the key questions and problems that have been addressed to date?
- Are there any important issues that have been insufficiently addressed to date?
Survey and Critique the Literature

- When analyzing research studies, must also identify some of the key elements that all research studies should include:
  - Problem
  - Purpose
  - Research questions
  - Sample
  - Methodology
  - Key findings
  - Conclusions
  - Recommendations
Write the Review

- Use the results of your analysis and critique of the literature to develop the organization of your review
- Develop a detailed outline
  - Identify the themes and/or patterns that have emerged
  - Translate these into headings and subheadings
  - Be sure your outline is logical
- Be selective with the literature you include
Write the Review

- Synthesis synthesis synthesis!
- Reorganize and reassemble all of the separate pieces and details to create an integrated whole
- Make connections between and among ideas and concepts
- Never present a chain of isolated summaries of previous studies
- The synthesis needs to build a knowledge base AND extend new lines of thinking
- Remember – this is your entry into the conversation
Write the Review

- Writing a literature review is a creative activity
- “An imaginative approach to searching and reviewing the literature includes having a broad view of the topic; being open to new ideas, methods, and arguments; ‘playing’ with different ideas to see whether you can make new linkages; and following ideas to see where they might lead.” – Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008
References