

notes on the literature review

Allison Parrish

the literature review

- ... is part of the concept development process
- ... will eventually become the "related work" section of your research paper

**first, a note on the word
"research"**

"practice" and "research"

- Practice: "*doing* something that extends beyond everyday thinking into actions... realizing them in some way"; e.g., "designing food packaging or making an artwork in paper, in wood or steel, to creating new dance moves or writing poems or travel journals" (Candy and Edmonds 64).
- Research: "a systematic investigation to establish facts, test theories and reach new knowledge or new understandings." Public research "achiev[es] something new in the world, and both its outcomes and methodology are expected to be available to anyone wishing to scrutinize or challenge it" (Candy and Edmonds 64).

"practice-based research"

- Practice-based research "is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice." The "creative artifact" produced in this process "is the basis of the contribution to knowledge" (Candy and Edmonds 63, 64).
- In this kind of research, the artifacts are not "expected to speak for themselves"; practitioners provide "commentary is needed that frames the context in which the artwork is to be understood... signposts that guide us to an understanding of its significance" (Candy and Edmonds 65, 66).

why do a literature review?

- It serves as "a 'bridge' between the identification of the research problem – the ‘what?’ – and researching that problem through the methodology – the ‘how?’" (Gray and Malins 35).
- *Specificity*. The contextual review helps you do is winnow down the scope of your project. If you know what other people have tried, then you can either try something else or build on their methodologies. The more specific the issue you're trying to address with your project, the better.
- The review also helps you determine if your project is even interesting to begin with. (You should probably try to make an interesting project.)

"Surveying the field and studying its history not only enable you to build on the work that others have already done and open your eyes to the possibilities — scholarly and creative — that lie before you, but these tasks are also imperative if you are to be able to contribute meaningfully to the field."

Shannon Mattern

**maybe better to call it a "contextual
review" (Gray and Malins 14)**

questions answered by the contextual review (Gray and Malins 35)

- *Why* is your research needed and what evidence is there to support this? (Rationale.)
- *Who* else in the field has addressed significant aspects of your research question? (Competitors, contributors, co-operators.)
- *When* (and possibly where) was the research carried out? (Currency, cultural context.)
- *How* has the research been carried out, and what are the implications of this for your methodology and specific methods?
- *What* aspects remain unexplored or require further work? ('Gaps' in knowledge, new ground.)

doing the literature review

reviews have false starts

- You're likely to gather many more sources in your initial review than will end up being useful to you. In your research paper's "Related work" section, you may only end up citing three or four things!
- But that doesn't mean that you'll only need to find three or four things.
- For every reference that you end up using in your paper, you'll need to go through (I dunno) ten or so references that end up being less relevant or not as useful. Become attuned to the idea that you will throw out some of this work.
- But this work isn't necessarily wasted! You may end up using the references you find in the future when continuing work on your project, or working on a different project entirely.

reading scholarly writing

- Not everything in your contextual review will be scholarly writing, but some of it might be. I like reading scholarly writing, but it can be scary and time-consuming.
- Understand the kind of writing you're reading: research or humanities?, position paper, literature review, monographs, essays, etc. What are the goals of the author? Who is their audience? (Links to definitions in the notes)

Allison's tips

- Skimming is always okay. Don't be afraid to move on to the next paper or chapter if you don't find something of interest.
- Read the abstract and make a quick summary for yourself of what the paper is about. What did the authors do and how did they do it? What are they arguing for and what are they arguing against?
- Have a goal in mind. Why are you reading this paper? If you're trying to figure out what people are doing, the abstract might be all you need to read! If you want to know how they're doing it, look at the methodology. Etc.
- Evaluate the research.
- Skip to the bibliography. Do their sources look familiar? Pick out the things that look interesting and add them to your list.
- Take notes and keep records. Add everything to your citation tracker, even if you decided the paper wasn't useful to you. (You never know when something will turn out to be important later!)
- Make use of folders and tags to keep things straight.
- Print papers out if it's useful for you.

the annotated bibliography

- In this class, your contextual review should result in an *annotated bibliography*.
- Note: The “contextual review” process is ongoing! You shouldn’t stop looking for references after you’re done with this assignment.
- The annotated bibliography is a list of things that you found, cited in appropriate bibliographic format, along with a paragraph or two that summarizes the source and reflects on its importance for your own project.
- The purpose of the annotated bibliography is to help you direct your research... and to show to the instructor that you’ve been doing the reading. The annotated bibliography can also serve as a starting point for the “Related work” section of your research paper.
- (see the notes for links to example annotated bibliographies)

Works cited

- Candy, Linda, and Ernest Edmonds. “Practice-Based Research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures from the Front Line.” *Leonardo*, vol. 51, no. 1, Feb. 2018, pp. 63–69.
- Gray, Carole, and Julian Malins. *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Ashgate, 2004.
- Mattern, Shannon. “Identifying Your Interests and Establishing a Research Plan.” *Words in Space*, Apr. 2010, <https://wordsinspace.net/2010/04/20/identifying-your-interests-and-establishing-a-research-plan/>.