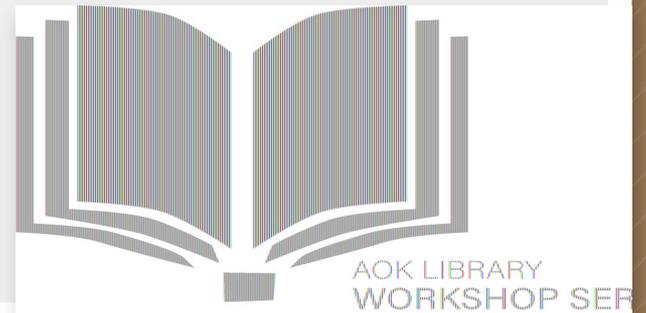


A top-down view of a wooden desk with various objects: a typewriter, a camera, glasses, a coffee cup, roses, and papers.

Humanities & Social Science Literature Review

Center for Social Science Scholarship & UMBC Library

(session is being recorded)



The Literature Review

Drew Alfgren & Erin Durham

Liberally adapted from Prof. Musgrove (UMBC),
University of Guelph, UNC, and others

A Literature Review:

- Discusses arguments scholars have made / are making
- *Analyzes* and *synthesizes* scholarly conversation
- Shows how the conversation has changed over time
- Allows you to identify gaps in the research

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Demonstrates your awareness of larger scholarly conversation
& allows you to show the *relevance* of your research

General Steps

- Identify Research Question – of course...
- Find your Sources
- Organize & Synthesize your Sources
- Write the Review

How is writing a literature review similar
to having a conversation?



Examples:

[Article example](#)

Dissertation example: Sanczyk, A. (2020). A narrative inquiry of second language teacher agency in promoting culturally responsive pedagogy

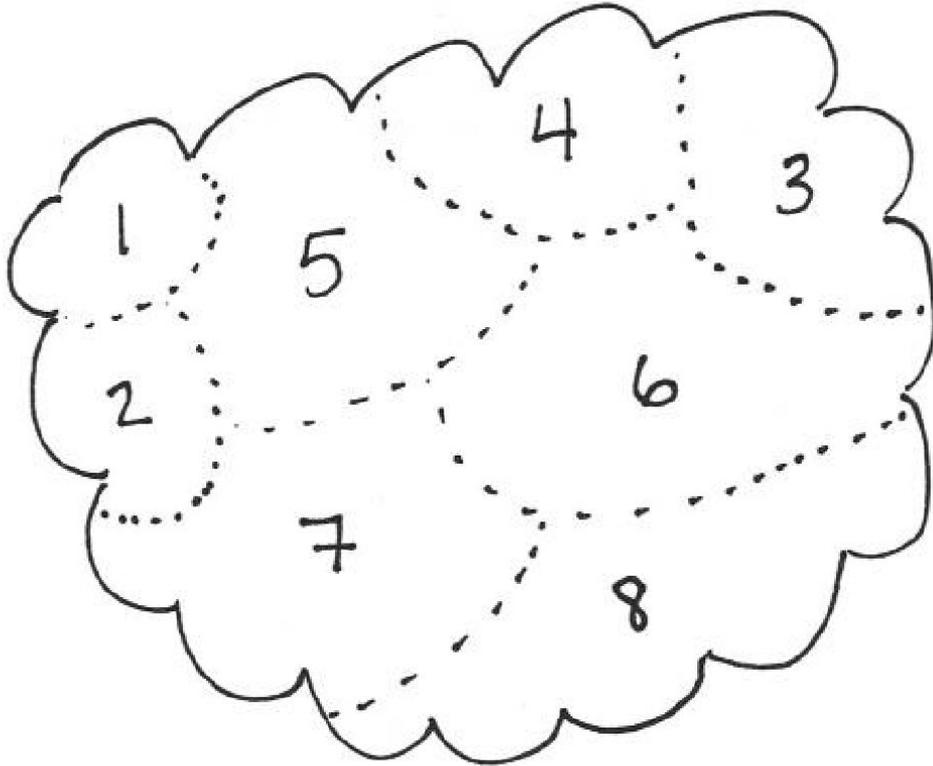
How is writing a literature review similar
to having a conversation?



“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...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...The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.”

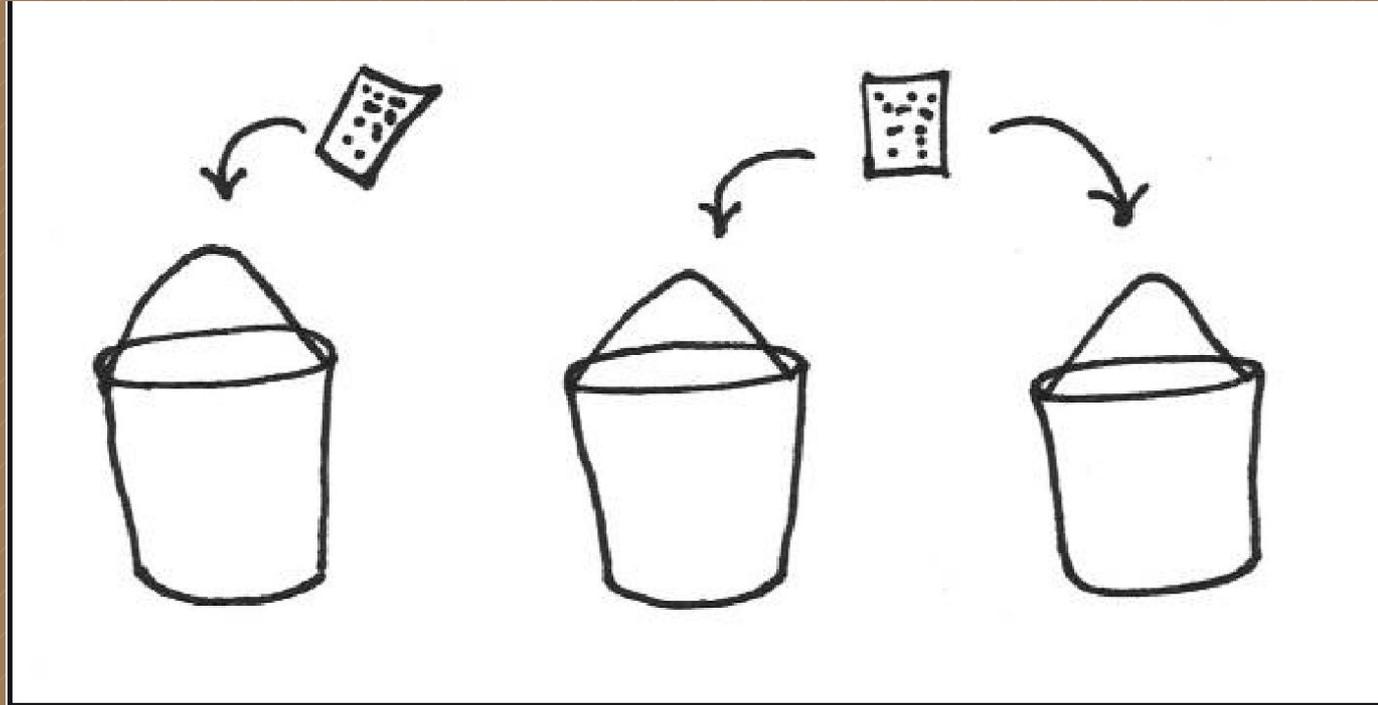
-Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*

Ways of thinking about a Lit. Review



A large thought bubble with multiple sections or themes

Another Way of thinking about a Lit. Review



A series of buckets into which you group different takes on a field or topic

How NOT to write a Lit. Review

Introduction

- Theory / Argument / Hypothesis

Author₁ says this ...

Author₂ says this ...

Author₃ says this ...

Author_∞ says this ...

Conclusion

All summary

No synthesis or analysis

Theme-Based Literature Review

Introduction

- Theory / Argument / Hypothesis

Theme 1: _____ (subheading)

- Author₁
 - Author₂
 - Author₃
- 
- A diagram consisting of three curved arrows pointing from right to left. The top arrow starts near Author
- ₁
- and points towards Author
- ₂
- . The middle arrow starts near Author
- ₂
- and points towards Author
- ₃
- . The bottom arrow starts near Author
- ₃
- and points towards Author
- ₂
- .

Theme 2: _____ (subheading)

- Author₄
 - Author₅
 - Author₆
- 
- A diagram consisting of three curved arrows pointing from right to left. The top arrow starts near Author
- ₄
- and points towards Author
- ₅
- . The middle arrow starts near Author
- ₅
- and points towards Author
- ₆
- . The bottom arrow starts near Author
- ₆
- and points towards Author
- ₅
- .

Conclusion

How TO write a Lit. Review

Steps

Pick a working topic: consult with your advisor, other faculty, and review older works done in your department.

Choose the literature you will review: Select databases and other lit sources & start identifying subject headings/ descriptors/ that are appropriate. Start identifying classic studies, theories, and theorists.

Analyze: Read broadly to start and identify assumptions, methodologies, testing procedures, and research findings. Note often-cited authors, major works, conflicting theories and contested results & how theories evolve (or not) over time.

Steps, cont.

- **Organize** - group your selected articles by identified patterns and themes: common findings, major trends in the research, which theories emerge as most influential.
- **Develop your thesis** - write a concise statement summarizing your conclusions about major trends and developments.



Steps, cont.

- **Organize *your* paper** – Develop headings and subheadings. The sections of your paper should link and progress thematically / topically, not by focusing on the work of individual researchers.
- **Write and review** – Focus on analysis: compare and evaluate the literature rather than list developments chronologically. Analysis and synthesis are the crucial elements.



Resources & Examples

Sage Knowledge

Oxford Bibliographies Online

“

Look at examples:

ProQuest
dissertations



Resources & Examples

Web of Science

Questions?

Library chat (library.umbc.edu)

[Virtual appointment](#)

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edurham@umbc.edu

