Literature Review Module

This module will help the user understand what a literature review is, how it can best be used, and provide resources and methods to search and review literature.
**THIS MODULE INCLUDES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Direct links clickable belo[Abstract]w)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- What is a literature review?
- What is a literature review for?
- Why review the literature?
- When should they be done?
- How do I get started?
  - Step 1
  - Step 2
  - Step 3
  - Step 4
- Some tips for literature reviews
- Additional Resources

**Purpose of module** – To illustrate best practices in evaluation by using literature reviews to compare what has been done in the field. Increase knowledge base of staff working on evaluations and analysis. Gives reader an understanding of what has been attempted, succeeded, and failed.
What is a literature review?

A literature review collects and analyses the published information on a particular topic or situation. The review can focus on a certain time period. Literature reviews will also show the research methodologies used to study an issue or the different monitoring and evaluation methods.

It will review all relevant documents: reports, guidelines, academic articles, news articles, journals, study notes, whitepapers. A simple literature review can be a summary of the sources, but a more useful review will organize the sources, summarize, and analyze the information relevant to your project. All sources are synthesized and re-organize to point out key information.

**A Literature Review is:**
- The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence. [This selection is] written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and
- The effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed. (Hart C. 1998. *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*, p. 13).

Literature reviews do not produce any new or original information on a subject, rather they gather and illustrate the existing studies of your topic. However, they can provide new interpretations of the material and may even evaluate the literature to give advice for the reader on relevant proposal direction and/or evaluation strategy.
What is a literature review for?

- Literature reviews help in baseline assessments, concept notes, and conflict analysis
- To collect information on previously conducted research and practice concerning a topic
- Help you understand the situation
- Illustrate what practice has been done, what works and what does not work
- Identify gaps in the research and practice
- Help justify your project and evaluation

Why review the literature?

- Gives a quick and solid overview guide on a particular subject matter, especially when you do not have time to do a full research.
- Keeps you up to date on what is going on currently in the field.
- Shows the wide-ranging results of previous research and practice on a problem or situation.
- Allows for a broad view on an issue or situation in order to focus on the topic area.
- Finds research and practice you were not aware of and which are relevant to the project.

Some of the questions the review of the literature can answer

Source: The Learning Centre. UNICEF http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au

How have approaches to these questions increased our understanding and knowledge?
When should they be done?

Literature reviews are done during the development of a proposal and as part of the data collection for conducting an evaluation. It is the foundation and support for developing evaluation approaches, and a first viewpoint of a situation or problem.

Top of the document

How do I get started?

- **Step 1:**
  - Determine the scope of the program or the program evaluation to decide what literature to focus on. Then, the scope can become more precise and the methods needed in an evaluation will become clearer.

- **Step 2:**
  - Search for literature. Collect all relevant documents and sources. See Resources below for helpful places to search for literature.

- **Step 3:**
  - Organizing and synthesizing sources: list publication; author; summarizing main points of the article; list main points concerning a specific theme (e.g. how author views the effectiveness of a certain peacebuilding or evaluation approach). Always note page numbers where possible for reflection, if needed.
  - This can be summarized in simple paragraphs or in table form. Organizing your literature and summaries in a table allows you to quickly refer to and find specific sources.
  - You can organize your review summary chronologically, thematically, or by relevancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>General Overview</th>
<th>How Author Viewed Effectiveness of Sanctions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Zhou, Weifeng, 'Linking International Trade and Labour Standards: The Effectiveness of Sanctions under the European Union' 2011 | • EU approach more incentive based, including different preferences for various country circumstances.  
• Giving additional preferences for ‘good behaviour’ (e.g. GSP+) (p. | • The EU sanction and withdraw of GSP for Belarus and Myanmar were unsuccessful. This was partly due to the countries close ties with strong economic countries, Russia and China (p. 76).  
• Sanctions are effective when (pp. 67-68, 76): |
Goal: stimulate export growth, contribute to reducing poverty, and promote sustainable development. (p. 65)

- When used against close trading partners (not the case with EU-Belarus & Myanmar).
- Used by a large country against a smaller target
- When sender’s goals are modest
- When sanctions are costly to the target but not the sender
- When sender and target are allies
- When the target does not receive aid from third parties
- When sanctions are short-term


- Focuses on humanitarian issues, travel sanctions, arms embargos.
- Targeted sanctions: “impact leaders, political elites, segments of society believed responsible for objectionable behaviour” (p.2).
  Focuses on certain groups of individuals aiming to directly affect the actors.
- “Travel sanctions seem to be primarily symbolic measures...” (p. 3).
- “Financial sanctions in general have a less immediate impact on trade flows and therefore cause less suffering” (p. 4).
  Additionally, they have proven to be more likely to achieve a policy change in the target country.
- Identification and tracking of funds belonging to an individual can be difficult.

- Step 4:
  - Analyze the literature and write out the key points for your evaluation purposes.
  - Examine the literature’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to your situation.
    Make notes both the relevant information that you find and your thoughts about this information. This will help you draw your ideas together when you develop your evaluation strategy.
  - Assessing each literature material:
    - Argument’s legitimacy supported by evidence
    - Author’s objectivity. Is some data ignored or biased?
    - Which sources are most/least persuasive
    - Contribution. Does the literature significantly contribute to the field and help understand the subject
Sample Literature Review Text:

“In 1984, Jenny Cushman, in her perspective article, 'The Chinese community in Australian historiography' made a passionate plea for historians to move away from studies of Australian attitudes to "relocate the Chinese experience within the Chinese community itself". She further urged researchers to investigate the way Chinese customs, legal notions and kinship relations were adapted to the Australian physical and social environment. It is tempting to credit many of the succeeding changes to Cushman's appeal. However, the new approaches must be viewed within the context of the changing tide of historiography and the impact of 'multiculturalism'.

... But to say this is to point to wider implications for history making in Australia. The Eurocentric histories of the past cannot simply be corrected by including the 'Chinese', especially if clear ethnic separations based on assumed single identities are maintained. It is necessary to go beyond Orientalist contrasts between us and them, Australian and Chinese, and to engage in a re-examination of sites of difference and dialogue. These sites will show the need to envisage multiple identities. They may also sometimes point to shared experiences of a shared world. Separate histories of ethnic peoples are not enough, especially if they serve to contain and exclude these peoples. Instead there is a need for a new synthesis in Australian history. The crucial need for historians is to personally engage with the contemporary politics of difference.”

Some tips for literature reviews?

- Keep your literature search narrow to limit the number of document results. Picking three or four different themes (objectives) can help narrow your search. Sum up what the literature tells you about each theme to compare the different points of view of the authors and to point out if any questions remain unanswered.

- Search for other literature reviews in the field you are working in. Finds ways you like to organize your review and synthesis.
- While relevance is important, review the most current sources. Documents between 5-10 years old are a good target.
- In Internet searches, insert your research subject with the word “review” to find articles to include in your synthesis.
- Use the bibliography of articles you have already read to find more articles, reports, and other documents for review.

Literature Review Example

- **Literature Review on Effectiveness of the Use of Social Media**, 2010
- **Theory of Change Review**: A Report Commissioned by Comic Relief, 2011
- **Conflict Prevention: Methodology for Knowing the Unknown**, 2004
Additional Resources

The following resources are particularly good for the development of a literature review

- Google scholar
- EBSCOhost
- JSTOR
- Lexisnexis (news articles, law journals, government reports)
- Heinonline (legal research)
- Organization’s publications and research:
  - OECD DAC
  - SIPRI databases
  - ICRC
  - Mercy Corps
  - CARE
  - DCAF (security sector governance and reform)
  - Human Rights Watch
  - International Crisis Watch

Resources on writing literature reviews:


The Learning Centre, UNSW, Getting started on your literature review.


