Conducting A Literature Review

When writing about academic advising, literature reviews serve at least four important purposes:

- identifying / clarifying a topic,

- contextualizing the writing,

- summarizing and documenting the extant literature,

- providing important background readers need to understand the work.

Regardless of the review's specific purpose, developing a concise, focused problem / question is a critical precursor to completing a literature review. Without one, a literature review will quickly sprawl out of control.

Here, in mere alphabetical order, are a few suggestions for completing a literature review:

1. <u>Articles from existing publication venues</u>. Published articles can guide a literature review in at least two ways. First, many articles include a list of "key words" that can be useful. For example, McClellan (2007) identified the following key words as part of his article on servant leadership in academic advising: mentor, philosophy of advising, relational advising, theory of advising.

   Additionally, writers should look at the references for articles related to their own question / topic. For example, the McClellan article includes more than thirty references—and each of those references is likely to include even more.

2. <u>"Key word" search</u>. Whether a generalized Google search, a Google Scholar search or a specific database search, key words can provide useful references for a literature review. Thinking creatively about key words at the start of a literature review is a good idea, but limiting actual searches to a few from the initial list will produce a more focused result.

   For example, conducting a literature review on ethics in academic advising would likely use "ethics" and "ethics in advising" as key words, but might also incorporate "models for ethical decision making," "ethics dilemmas," and "ethical perspectives" as key words. Knowing the names of some specific terms within any of those areas is also helpful. For example, "ethical perspectives" can include things like utilitarianism and deontology.

3. <u>Librarians</u>. Librarians are experts at information search and retrieval! Many campuses designate specializations for reference librarians; on such campuses, writers should check with the specialist in education, psychology or other fields

that inform a specific piece of writing. Librarians can also provide instruction in how to use available online databases, such as ABI Inform, ERIC and Academic Search Premier (EBSCO).

4. NACADA resources. NACADA's web site (www.nacada.ksu.edu) provides links to several useful tools for conducting a literature review, especially when that review is related to / part of a research project. Examples of NACADA resources include: the Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources, past issues of the *NACADA Journal* and *Academic Advising Today* and one or more member-discounted publications, such as *The New advisor guidebook: Mastering the art of academic advising (2nd edition)*.

    Additionally, writers and researchers with all levels of experience and expertise are welcome to subscribe to NACADA's research listserv by following the directions at http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Listserv-Mailing-Lists/Academic-Advising-Research.aspx Questions posed on the list typically get plenty of feedback from other subscribers.

Some links to other sources that discuss how to conduct a literature review include those below. Again, they are presented in alphabetic order:

- Conducting a literature review (Open University)

- Literature reviews (The Writing Center, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill)

- The Literature Review: A Few Tips on Conducting It (Dena Taylor, University of Toronto)

Finally, a few comments about attribution. No matter the venue, proper source citations are essential! As noted by Lightner et al. (2011, p. 27), "Any misappropriation of another's work is ethical misconduct, risking not only academic censure and publishing prohibitions, but professional society rebuke or expulsion." Beyond the ethical and legal perspectives, appropriate attribution in the form of citations:

- Acknowledges the contributions of other scholars to later writing

- Allows other writers to locate, interpret and utilize primary sources for their own work

- Demonstrates that a particular piece of writing is more than the mere opinion / viewpoint of the author

- Lends weight and credibility to a writer's work

And, while citing primary sources is the preferred alternative, writers may utilize secondary sources when they have exhausted options for finding an original work (McAdoo, 2010).

Literature reviews may not be the most exciting part of writing, but they are essential. Writers with all levels of experience are encouraged to take advantage of the preceding suggestions in preparing thoughtful, comprehensive literature reviews.

References

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