

# Literature Review

## Using Sources

During the literature search, researchers need to understand the main issues discussed in key studies relevant to the target topic, form an idea of how the materials relate to the research question(s) and mention the results of their explorations and reading as well as their response to them.

Instead of treating others' voices, data, findings, claims, and evidence as untouchable exhibits to be presented, a researcher needs to *think through* them and engage with them critically. Nonetheless, what may cause a problem is to preserve the integrity of what a source says -making sure that its findings or arguments are not distorted- and also to clearly give credit to the source of information. Paraphrases, summaries and quotations are techniques that help guard against mischaracterizing what a source mentions.

### Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is saying with one's own words—and with about the same length as the author said it—what one understands the author to mean. This is hard, at first, because instead of just mindlessly quoting; one has to *think thoroughly* about the ideas and views of the author. Paraphrasing demands making a sense of something. To put it most simply: *Good writers find their own ways of saying things.*

### Summarizing

Summarizing is a reduction of a longer material into a brief statement that captures a basic idea, argument, or theme from the original source. Like paraphrasing, summarizing often requires careful thought. Although a summary can never be purely objective, it needs to be fair. After all, each of us will understand a text differently, but at the same time, we have to do our best to represent what a source is actually saying without prejudice.

### Quoting

In order to quote certain words, the researcher has to pay attention to *how* authors (and those quoted by authors) say things. Is the prose unusual, surprising, or memorable? Does the writer make a point in an interesting way?

There are several other reasons to quote:

- To bring in the voice, not just the ideas, of a notable expert on your topic.
- To quote someone who says something effectively that supports a key point the researcher is trying to make.
- When writing an essay that uses primary sources—a literary text, a transcript, and so on—quoted material is essential.

As a rule, however, the college research paper should contain no more than 10 or 20 percent quoted material. Therefore, the researcher has to *quote selectively*. Sometimes, they do not need to use all of the passage. Mine phrases or sentences that are particularly distinctive, and can be embedded in one's prose. They also have to *provide a context*. The worst way to use a quote is to just drop it into a paragraph without attribution or comment. Bringing someone else's voice into one's work, requires mentioning the source and indicating why what this person says is particularly relevant. In addition to establishing a context for a quotation, the quote needs to be analysed, argued with, amplified, explained, or highlighted.

### Mentioning where the information comes from

In order to give credit to the source of information, the following elements have to be used:

**Attribution tags:** *According to ...*, *\_\_\_\_\_ argues that ...*, *\_\_\_\_\_ reported that ...*, and so on. In the case of summarizing and paraphrasing.

**Quotation marks:** they clearly signal when we are borrowing the words of others.

**Citation:** In academic writing, references to the source are integrated into the texts so readers can see where the information comes from. Of course, one of the reasons of signaling that is to avoid plagiarism, something that many of us do—if we do it at all—unintentionally.

### Engaging critically with the literature

A strong Literature Review shows an awareness of the disagreements or controversies that exist, in recognition of the fact that authors don't always agree with each other. This awareness of the various perspectives discussed will help the researcher develop their own views. Disagreeing with a specific view means that they may have limitations; for example, they do not seem applicable to the context of the researcher's country or L1. Building awareness of alternative viewpoints and interpretations and considering one's own position in relation to these is part of 'critically engaging with the literature'. Such engagement will help the researcher situate their work within the existing literature and body of knowledge about the topic. Of course, the researcher will need to provide support or evidence for their ideas. Citing an authoritative source that supports their view or that provides counterevidence to the claim adds credibility and authority to their position. In the absence of a suitable reference to support one's view, the counterview may sound like a personal opinion.

## **Phrases to help formulate a critical stance**

### ***Introducing questions, problems or limitations***

'A weakness with this argument, however, is that . . .'

'One of the limitations with this explanation is that it does not account for . . .'

'One problem with this explanation is that . . .'

'However, this method of analysis has a number of limitations.'

'Another problem with this approach is that it fails to take X into account.'

### ***Referring to previous work***

'Researchers have not treated X in much detail.'

'Previous studies of X have not dealt with . . .'

'Most studies in the field of X have only focused on . . .'

'The research to date has tended to focus on X rather than Y.'

### ***Incorporating criticisms from other writers***

'Many scholars now argue that this approach has had only limited success.'

'Jones (2003), for example, argues that . . .'

'Jones (2003) has also questioned why . . .'

'However, Jones (2003) points out that . . .'