



The Literature Review

First, if you have not looked at the Writing Center's resource page on how to write an Annotated Bibliography, please do so. You will employ the source evaluation tools you used there to form the literature review. This handout assumes that you have written an Annotated Bibliography using the Source Evaluation Matrix we provide. If you have not done that already, please do so before getting started on this.

What is a literature review?

A literature review may be written as part of the introduction to a larger piece of research or it may be an assignment itself. The function of the review is to chart the evolving intellectual discussion on the topic. You are asking, "What have the big thinkers been saying about this since this debate began?" and "What are the gaps in the research on this?"

Put very simply, it proves to the reader you have done your homework by identifying what people have and have not been talking about.

How do I begin?

Look at one source.

Articulate what that source is arguing.

Use your Annotated Bibliography to help you evaluate the argument.

Ask yourself:

- Where does this writer fall in the evolving timeline of the discussion? Is this writer approaching the issue from a particular theoretical framework (Marxist theory, post-colonial theory, feminist theory, etc.)? How does the writer see the issue being discussed through the lens of that theory?
- Is this source responding to others in the field? By saying what?
- How does this source shed light on the major issues, challenge them, redefine them, etc.?

Once you have asked these questions of all of your sources, you can attempt to weave the sources together into a discussion that charts the evolving discussion on the issue over time. The key here is to weave and group the sources. Do not create a laundry list of sources based on chronology where every paragraph is simply a summary of each source.

For example, you must show how X is responding to Y when X says Z and how Z helped redefine the field, which led to a branching out of the debate into subfields led by A, D, and B, for example.

The literature review demonstrates that you have read widely in the field and that you are able to isolate other writers' arguments, pull them together and categorize them, evaluate them, and show how they impact the developing field.

Remember: you are not advancing your thesis here. You are demonstrating how others' theses have impacted the field of study.

Here is an example of an acceptable part of a student's unedited literature review:

Similar to Crouch's criticism of the NCAA classifying Division 1 athletes as amateurs, Sack and Staurowsky claim that the idea of amateurism has been utilized by the NCAA to exploit student athletes. Yost, Sack, and Staurowsky expose the business design of the NCAA that uses athletes as a marketed product through their talents and appeal. This corrupt manner in which the NCAA perceives athletes as the prized commodity of their "Entertainment Product" (Yost 19) questions the integrity of the NCAA. These researchers promote change in the current model that prevents the NCAA from overshadowing the academic potential of the student athletes in favor of the economic dimensions of the college football business.

Taking into account all of the various dimensions in which defects reside in the college football system, Jim Pagels, economic researcher, evaluates how the NCAA could ultimately fall. Pagels refers to the NCAA and the manner in which it aggressively imposes its control on student athletes as a "cartel." He scrutinizes the current system pointing out that it only benefits the top conferences in alliance with the NCAA in terms of the revenue collected. Historian Taylor Branch echoes the sentiments of Pagels in a manner that refutes the arguments of critics who attempt to demoralize athletes for receiving gifts from boosters. Pagels argues that the smaller athletic programs lose money, using these facts to propose a change in partnerships the NCAA has implemented with universities and ultimately pay players. Likewise, Branch exposes the major college football conferences for the outrageous amount of revenue they collect off the backs of their players.

While these arguments point out the flaws in the NCAA student athlete system, none of them offer a coherent strategy to address the problem. If we apply design strategist Tim Brown's concepts of design thinking to this problem, solutions emerge almost instantly. Brown argues that the first steps in applying design thinking involve empathizing and stakeholder involvement in prototyping. This paper will address the gaps in the intellectual conversation on the flaws of the current system by applying design thinking strategies to argue for a workable and mutually beneficial solution to the current exploitative conditions that student athletes endure.