Bringing Order out of the Chaos: Research Organization and Synthesis

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Main questions

How much research do I need?
How do I organize my research?
How do I find meaning in the research?
How do I write my research prospectus?
How can I find support in the writing process?
How much research do I need?

It depends on the project

- Empirical/statistical paper = 12-15 sources
- Lit. review with independent conclusion = 20-30 sources

Keep research ongoing

- No single “research phase”
- Don’t wait to start writing
How do I organize my research?

Option 1: Self-made Word document w/ annotated bib.

- Annotation = 2-3 sentences on main subject matter of source and its possible relevance to your research topic
- Keywords to aid memory
- This method is easy to use and ideal for projects with 12-15 sources
How do I organize my research?

Option 2: Reference-managing software (Mendeley, EndNote)

- Create a personal research library w/ notations
- Available anywhere

**Caution**: These programs take time to learn and optimise
### Citation Statistics

**Authors:** R. Adler, J. Ewing, P. Taylor

**Journal:** *Statistical Science*

**Year:** 2009

**Volume:** 24

**Issue:** 1

**Pages:** 1-14

**Abstract:**

View research catalog entry for this paper

**Tags:**

citation; mendeley

**Keywords:**

citation data; citation statistics; citations; h-index; impact factor; journal evaluation; research evaluation; sci; scientific ranking

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How do I organize my research?

Pick **one method** and stick with it

- All options can include organization, annotation, and remote access

Beware the time suck and start writing

- Research programs can be useful, but involve a learning curve
How do I find meaning in the research?

Engage with the literature

• Print out as much as possible
• Read, mark, highlight, write in the margins

Gain an understanding

• Become familiar with main questions and methods related to your topic
• What is everyone doing and how are they doing it?
How do I find meaning in the research?

Determine where you stand

• It’s okay to respectfully disagree with a research article
• Research is meant to be analyzed

Identify researchers/approaches that appeal to you

• Think about why you’re drawn to these people and methods
• Consider using the same analytical approach & applying it to another data set
How do I find meaning in the research?

Look for commonalities

• Map out the results of previous research
• By date, by finding, by research group, etc.

Identify gaps/space to work in

• Find ongoing scholarly discussions and consider the contribution you could make
How do I write my research prospectus?

Follow the steps in Appendix 2 of course syllabus: sections A – C are the most difficult to write because those sections require analysis and synthesis.

**Section A: Topic and rationale**

- **Paragraph 1:** You want to establish that something is important. Say why it is important. Then assert that despite its importance, it remains relatively unexamined. Bonus points for not actually using the word “important.”

- **Paragraph 2:** Establish the reasons why your thesis matters/is important. These reasons should move from broader (socially important) to narrower (why it matters to how something is done or studied in your field of interest)
How do I write my research prospectus?

Section B: Literature review—What to do

- Focus on concepts, ideas and methods shared across the literature—each paragraph of the lit review should be staking out a position that identifies common or related (A) research questions (B) research design (C) conclusions that exist among the articles you are reviewing.

- Integrating previous research along conceptual and methodological lines allows you to explain (A) base of knowledge in your field and (B) how your project fits into the literature and is thus relevant/important.
How do I write my research prospectus?

Section B: Literature review– What NOT to do

• Avoid the “boxcar” approach: paragraph 1 summarizes one article; paragraph 2 summarizes another article; and so on, each article summarized in its own separate paragraph

• Boxcar approach has no organizing principle and is purely descriptive– it does not help you in writing section C– your own thesis statement and how your project fits into and contributes to the literature in your field
How do I write my research prospectus?

Section C: Thesis statement

• In a paragraph you establish what you will do in your proposed study: if you wrote an integrated lit review this paragraph should almost write itself

• The structure of the paragraph should follow the “formula” for persuasive paragraphs in BCaP Effective Claims handout

https://tippie.uiowa.edu/sites/tippie.uiowa.edu/files/documents/effective_claims.pdf
How do I write my research prospectus?

Section D: Outline anticipated sections

• Provide a brief overview of the major sections you anticipate with 3-5 sentences for each section.

• Include potential subheadings – subheadings that establish a position (includes a verb) more useful than functional subheadings (nouns only)

Section E: Reference section

• Proposals feature articles you already read and those you intend to read

• APA style https://tippie.uiowa.edu/how-write-bibliography
How can I find support in the writing process?

- Frank Center can help you with clarity and organization
- Some of our grad tutors are PhD students and familiar with the research thesis process
- Consider making a standing weekly appointment with a grad tutor or advanced undergrad tutor in your field of study
- Expect to review 2-3 pp. of analytical writing (e.g. prospectus sections A – C) per 40-minute appointment

https://tippie.uiowa.edu/about-tippie/centers-institutes/frank-business-communication-center