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So You Have to Write a Paper? Consider Writing a Literature Review

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So You Have to Write a Paper: Consider Writing a Literature Review

Sue Ann Gardner, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Nebraska Library Association, Oct. 7, 2011, Lincoln, NE



2011.10.7

Literature Review, Defined

I'm writing a book. I've got the page numbers done. --Steven Wright

Emerald

A literature review is a description of the literature relevant to a particular field or topic. It gives an overview of what has been said, who the key writers are, what are the prevailing theories and hypotheses, what questions are being asked, and what methods and methodologies are appropriate and useful. As such, it is not in itself primary research, but rather it reports on other findings.

University of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center

[T]he purpose of a review is to analyze critically a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of prior research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles.



Aspects of Literature Reviews

I know I was writing stories when I was five. I don't know what I did before that. Just loafed I suppose. --P. G. Wodehouse

- Literature reviews are often part of a research paper, but they can be stand-alone
- They are usually not comprehensive overviews of a topic, but if the topic is new or obscure, it may be that your literature review will cover all relevant literature

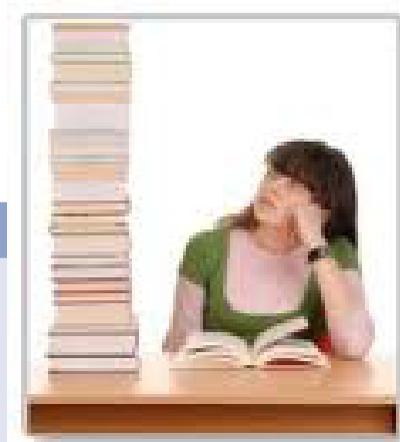


Why Write a Literature Review?

It took me fifteen years to discover I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up because by that time I was too famous. --Robert Benchley

- It can help hone a research question
- Because a literature review is a distillation of the important topics on a subject, it is helpful for readers who don't have the time to read all of the pertinent literature
- Because it is useful, it will tend to be highly cited

Methods



- Choose a topic
- Determine your scope
- Choose what types of sources will be valid
- If a review will be extensive, consider working with a co-author and each prepare sections
- Do not rely on quotes throughout the paper
- The review will not usually be comprehensive
- Select the most relevant, high-quality sources
- May be accompanied by a list of sources
- Use the correct style and citation format
- The paper should include analysis and synthesis

Library Resources and Technical Services

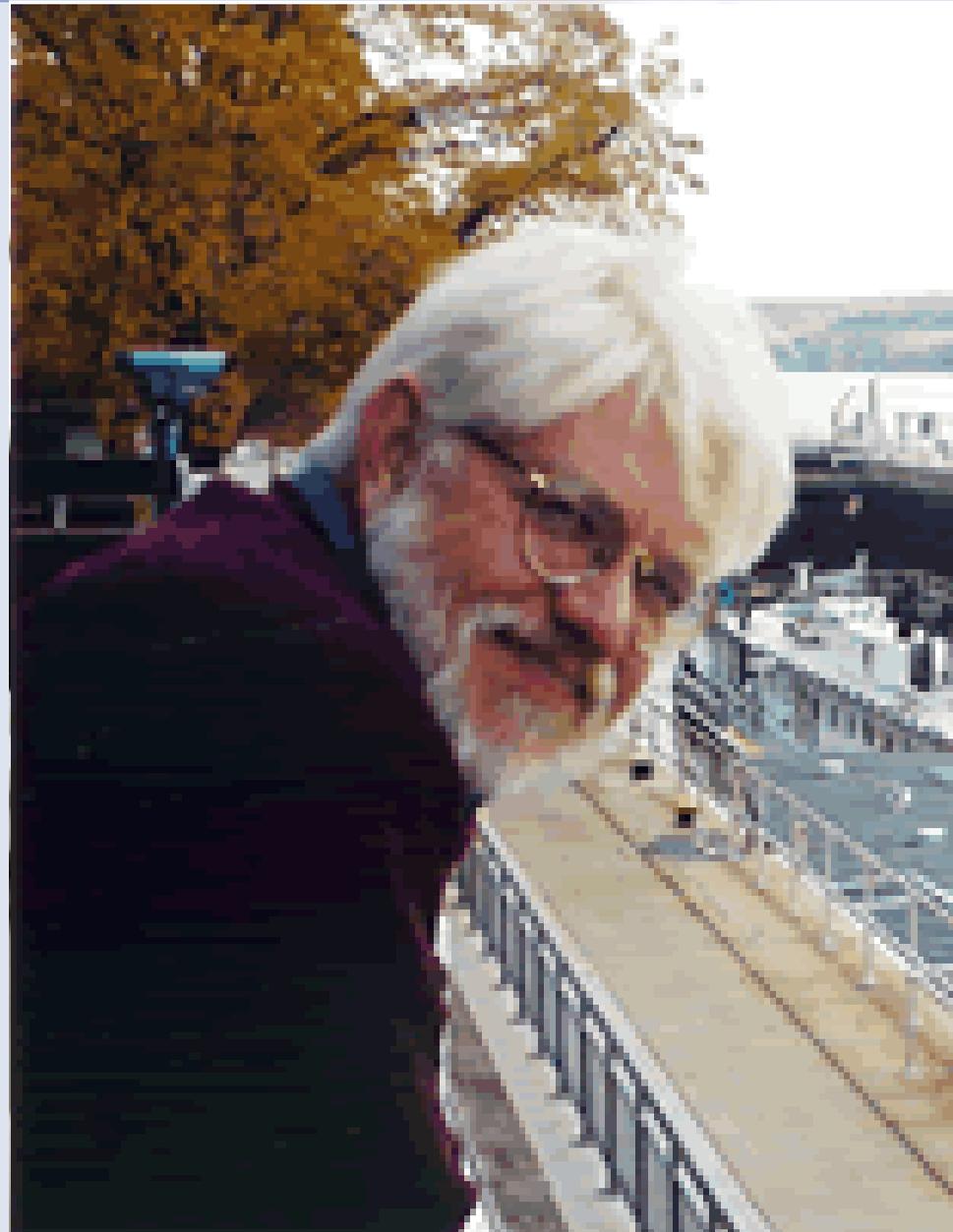
- Official publication of ALA-ALCTS, founded in 1957
- Literature reviews on cataloging and classification since 1968 (C. Donald Cook)
- One or two reviews a year through the 1970s and 1980s
- No reviews from the early 1990s the mid-2000s
- Biennial reviews again since 2007, under Peggy Johnson



LRTS Call for Papers

- February 2010, Elaine Westbrook, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- Proposals due March 2010, including letter and budget
- Notified April 2010
- \$1,000 Carnegie-Whitney grant

Charles Wilt
ALA ALCTS Executive Director



Use of Carnegie-Whitney Funds

Writing is an act of faith, not a trick of grammar. --E. B. White



- Hired an assistant to compile citations
- Purchased library materials
- Purchased supplies

Assistant

- **Anna Sophia Cotton**, a recent graduate of the University of Missouri School of Information Science and Learning Technologies
- Using *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts* and Google, she compiled hundreds of citations, August-November 2010



Methods Used to Prepare the *LRTS* Review

When Shakespeare was writing, he wasn't writing for stuff to lie on the page; it was supposed to get up and move around. --Ken Kesey

- Conducted many more searches on my own, including circle searches
- Compiled papers, organized by source
- Printed many of the papers (approximately 300)
- Sorted them by general topic
- Began to read them in December 2010, and to take hand-written notes on the papers themselves
- Began writing in February 2011
- Wrote exclusively, April-June 2011
- Turned the paper in June 30, 2011 (on time)

Cataloging and Classification Research Interest Group
American Library Association Midwinter Meeting
January 9, 2011, San Diego, CA

Cataloging and Classification Literature Review, 2009-2010,
Preparation for Library Resources & Technical Services:
Project Update



Peer-Review Process

Our admiration of fine writing will always be in proportion to its real difficulty and its apparent ease. --Charles Caleb Colton

- Heard back from the editor in August
- The reviewers suggested several changes
- Deadline of October 18 to get the revised paper back



Sources to Consult

The Literature for T. Budd at St. Lawrence University
<http://it.stlawu.edu/~tbudd/litrev.html>

Literature Reviews, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/specific-writing-assignments/literature-reviews>

Writing Literature Reviews, Monash University
<http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/general/lit-reviews/index.xml>

How to Write a Literature Review, Karen Bordonaro
<http://www.slideshare.net/jthiessen/lit-reviewshortversion>

Know When to Use Quotations, Western Oregon University
<http://go.nebraska.edu/5> [shortened link]

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