



Doing your literature review: an overview

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Reproductive health research methodology training at the Ministry of Public Health,
Kabul, Afghanistan, 3-12 January 2008

What is literature review?

“... a systematic...method for **identifying, evaluating and interpreting** the ...work produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners.”

FINK, A., 1998. *Conducting literature research reviews: from paper to the internet*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage., p.3.

Why review the literature?

“...without it you will not acquire an **understanding** of your topic, of what has **already been done** on it, how it has been **researched**, and what the **key issues** are.”

HART, E., 1998. *Doing a literature review: releasing the social science research imagination*, by E. Hart and M. Bond. London: Sage., p.1.

How do I begin?

- After selecting your topic, the next step of the literature review is to search for, evaluate, and collect the literature.
 - **Search for** means to locate citations to possible sources using catalogs, indexes, databases, references in a book or journal, etc.
 - **Evaluate** means to determine the relevancy and quality of the literature (currency and whether it comes from a peer-reviewed or scholarly publication).
 - **Collect** means to gather the sources in electronic or paper (hard copy) form.

What are the best sources to use?

- **Journals:** Scholarly, peer-reviewed articles are written by experts in the field with other experts in mind as an audience. These articles often report on primary research within a very specific niche of a scholarly discipline.
- **Dissertations/Theses:**
- **Conference Proceedings:**
- **Books:** Books generally are not peer-reviewed, but are often written by experts such as professors or scientists. Many of the books in USM libraries have been chosen by librarians specifically because they are based on peer-reviewed or otherwise authoritative sources. Though there are books that contain essays on very specific topics, books are generally a good place to get a detailed overview of a subject.
- **Government Publications:** Although government publications are not peer-reviewed in the traditional academic sense, they generally undergo rigorous internal review. Government sources can be excellent sources of primary data. In some subject areas, government publications may be the only sources of information available.
- **Internet:** Because there is no review process for much of the information that you may discover while using a search engine, it is extremely important to evaluate Web sites with a critical eye in order to determine whether the source is authoritative, unbiased, and current. However, there are some worthwhile sources on the Web.