Effectively Locating, Reading, and Citing Research

Effectively Locating Research

1. The primary way in which research is communicated is through its publication in academic, peer-reviewed journals.

   a. Peer-review helps to ensure that research is of high quality.

   b. We submit our work to a journal, and individuals who are experts in the area of research critique our work. This process is referred to as a "blind review." The authors of the submitted manuscripts do not know who it is that is reviewing their work; the reviewers are not told who the author is. This helps to reduce the potential for favoritism or bias.

   c. Your search of the literature should largely be confined to peer-reviewed journals. DO NOT cite or reference a book or book chapter unless you intend on thoroughly reading it.

2. The most effective way to search for research on a given topic is to access a database that gives you access to a wide variety of peer-reviewed journals. In the field of criminology/criminal justice there are several databases that can be used, including:

   a. Criminal Justice Abstracts
   b. Criminal Justice Periodicals
   c. Sociological Abstracts
   d. psycINFO

3. These databases can be directly access through the FIU library website (library.fiu.edu).

   a. On the library homepage click the drop down menu for "Find" and select "A-Z List." From the page that loads you can locate a specific database by clicking on the first letter of the database name and scrolling to the link for the specific database.

   b. You must be logged into the FIU library system to freely access journal articles. If you are working from a location away from campus you will need to login via the 'login for access' link located in the middle of the library home page. You can then login using your e-mail information OR the library number located on the back of your Student ID card.

4. Identifying the databases is just the beginning. It is important to learn how to effectively use the databases. You do not want your search to be too narrow, because you might miss important articles; you also do not want your search to be too broad, because you may then end up wasting a lot of time scanning and/or reading research that is not actually relevant for your review.

a. Boolean operations (AND; OR; NOT) can help to widen or narrow your search

b. You have options to search the entire text of an article, the abstract, authors, title, keywords, etc.

5. Databases will all often have options to restrict your search to peer-reviewed (which is important); date range, publication type, and language.

   a. Searching for articles that are more recent can be a good idea in many cases, because recent research articles usually contain their own literature reviews where previous studies in that area have been conducted.

6. Databases will more often than not provide you with direct links to the journal article, and if not will often provide you a link to the homepage for the journal in which an article has been published.

   a. As students, you have free access to these journals and articles, assuming the University has paid for a subscription to the journal. In some cases, especially with journals that are not well-known or well-cited, access is restricted.

7. There are hundreds of journals in which researchers publish their research. Some of them are considered to be more prestigious than others. The more prestigious journals tend to publish research that is of higher quality, novel, and makes a significant advancement over previous research. Some of the most noteworthy journals in the field of criminology are:

   a. Criminology
   b. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency
   c. Justice Quarterly
   d. Journal of Quantitative Criminology
   e. Journal of Criminal Justice
   f. Crime and Delinquency
   g. Criminal Justice and Behavior
   h. Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology
   i. American Journal of Sociology
   j. American Sociological Review
   k. British Journal of Criminology
   l. Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice
   m. Journal of Youth and Adolescence

8. Google Scholar can be used effectively as *a supplement to* using the more traditional databases.

   a. scholar.google.com

   b. Google Scholar has some nice features, and many are consistent with those found in the databases. However, Google scholar also the added benefit of often letting

you know who has cited specific articles in their own work, which can help you to identify other articles that focus on similar topics.

   c. If you click on "cited by," you will be provided with a listing of others who have cited that article. Be careful, however, as this list may include far more than peer-reviewed journal articles.

   d. You can also link into the FIU Library system through Google Scholar. From the Google Scholar home page, click on the "settings" link from the dropdown menu on the left side of the page. Then, click "library links." Last, search for Florida International University and select the box for Find it at FIU. Now, if you are using Google Scholar from home, you can immediately access a publication through the "Find it at FIU" link that should appear next to most entries when you search using Google Scholar. This cuts down time on having to copy the title of a publication and then going into the FIU library websites in order to search for and access research.

   e. You can also execute an "advanced" search in Google Scholar by clicking on the same dropdown menu you would use to access the settings.

Effectively Reading Research

1. Most journal articles in the social sciences have a typical format to them, and understanding this can be immensely helpful for young scholars who do not have a lot of experience reading research. The main components of a research article include:

   a. Abstract
   b. Introduction
   c. Literature Review Sections
   d. Current Study
   e. Data/Measures
   f. Results (Typically statistics and tables)
   g. Discussion and Conclusion

2. The organization of an article will not always follow this precise order. Moreover, section and sub-section headings, particularly for the literature review section of an article, will almost never read "literature review."

3. For the purposes of conducting your own literature review, there are certain sections of articles to focus upon more than others.

   a. For example, beginning graduate students most likely will not be able to grasp a lot of what is being said in the results section of the paper because they are probably not familiar with the statistical methods being used. That is okay. Most times the authors will have a narrative of what is going on so that you can keep track of the major issue at hand. *This is particularly true within the discussion and conclusion sections of articles*.

b. The *literature review section* of a paper is one area to focus upon, because if the authors are doing their due diligence they should be providing you as the reader an overview of what previous studies have found regarding the topic at hand. Thus, by reading the literature review you will be pointed to other studies that you can then locate, and read, to ensure that your own literature review is thorough.

c. The *current study section* and the discussion and conclusion sections often can help you to identify two things. First, they will help you to identify why the current study is important. In other words, it is important to know how the current effort improves upon previous work in the area. If it does not, then why would it have been published? Second, the discussion and conclusion section often identifies gaps that still need to be addressed on the topic. The identification of these gaps can often prompt new research. You may wish to focus on one or more of these gaps for your own research.

d. The *data/measures section* will identify for you how the data for the study was collected, when it was collected, and how key things were measured. The goal that we as social researchers try and achieve is to be thorough enough in our description of the data and the analysis that if we handed over the data set to any other social researcher they could reproduce our results. In other words, we need to be as transparent as possible. This transparency can be another avenue through which you might be able to identify ways in which future research (maybe even your own) could improve upon what was done or what was collected and analyzed.

4. Literature review sections of papers, if they are focused on testing a specific theory, will often provide summaries of the main theoretical arguments that pertain to the theory being tested. This information could potentially be invaluable to you, as if your research involves the testing of a theory you will need to orient readers to what the theory proposes.

5. For research articles that are focused on evaluating the effectiveness of a policy or program, the literature review will often provide information on the program or policy, which would aid you in the process of writing your own paper if you are focusing on the evaluation of a program, law, or policy initiative.

6. I find it to be very effective to create a one page summary for myself for each article I have read where I highlight 1) the unique contribution being made, 2) how the data was collected, 3) any major limitations, and 4) avenues for future research. You may wish to do the same.

Effectively Citing Research

1. When you read a journal article, any occasion where the author talks about other articles or books in the body of the text is referred to as a citation.

a. For example, Meldrum and Hay (2012) found that peer associations may influence self-control during early adolescence. This would be an example of a

citation in which the author's work is mentioned by identifying the author in the body of the text, followed by the year.

    b. An alternative way to cite the work of others is to describe findings in general and then cite who found those things: Recent research reveals that peer associations may influence self-control during adolescence (Meldrum and Hay, 2012).

2. The full listing of all citations in most academic journal articles can be found at the end of the article (This contrasts law review articles, where citations are usually found at the bottom of each page on which a citation is made). These pages are referred to as the 'references.' Most students know them as the 'works cited' pages.

3. When an article cites another piece of research for the first time, the last names of all the authors are *typically* included in the citation.

    a. For example, Young, Barnes, Meldrum, and Weerman (2011) found that individuals who are more heavily involved in delinquency tend to overestimate the delinquency of their friends.

    b. If in the course of the article (or literature review) you again make reference to the same piece of research, and there are more than two authors, we use the phrase "et al." So in the example above I might say, "Young et al. (2011) also found that some individuals underestimate the delinquency of their friends."

    c. If there is only one or two authors of a piece of research, you always list both last names. For example, 'In a recent meta-analysis, Pratt and Cullen (2000) found that self-control is a significant predictor of delinquent and criminal behavior.

4. The reference pages include a variety of information pertaining to each piece of research that was cited in the body of the text of the article, including the names of the authors, the year the piece was published, the title of the article, the title of the journal the article was published in, along with the volume and pages.

    a. In the case of a book, there would be no title of the journal, just the title of the book. The name of the publishing company and location would also be included.

5. Google Scholar now has a link (appearing in the form of a quotation mark) provided underneath each listing in search results. If you click on this quotation mark it will provide you with (most of the time) the proper APA reference (and many other reference styles) for that article or book. Copying and pasting this into the references pages of your own papers can save a lot of time, but you always want to verify the completeness and accuracy of the information.