

Introduction to the Literature Review Volume

It is important that we clarify at the outset what this small volume attempts and does not attempt to do. This is a volume that attempts to provide assistance during the later stages of the literature review process. In other words, it is concerned with the writing or, if you prefer, the writing up of a literature review (LR). It has not been designed to provide assistance with such preliminary explorations as finding a viable topic, using libraries or online search engines, or with note-taking or learning to use EndNote. Nor is it concerned with organizing files, managing time effectively, or structuring a research plan. To use a chess metaphor, we have focused on developing strong end games rather than strong opening moves. The topics we have stated as falling outside this book are, of course, important, but they are covered in the many websites, longer handbooks, and manuals that provide advice on how to carry out research. They also tend to be included in the increasing number of “how to” graduate courses on quantitative and qualitative research methods. Indeed, a better case can be made for providing assistance in the wider aspects of the research activity at the departmental or faculty level, rather than attempting the more general perspective adopted in this book. We should also point out that we have nothing here to say about so-called “writer’s block” or other phenomena that can cause a writer to become “stuck”: we are simply not experts in this area. If a writer does get “blocked,” professional assistance is usually available.

In many ways, the underlying organization of this volume is to proceed from the general to the specific or, to put it another way, to move from the macro to the micro. In this vein, we open with a number of *orientations* that are designed to raise general awareness about some of the issues that aggregate around telling the story of previous research in some area. We then address the question of how an LR might be structured and use here an extended illustrative case to underline the points we want to make. After these, we begin to zoom in on matters of language, style, and rhetoric. There is a section on explaining what you are doing (getting started) and one on using metadiscourse (writing about your text itself), both designed to help your reader see where you are going. These are followed by a fairly full dis-

cussion of various aspects of citation. Another extended case study comes next, followed by some material on paraphrasing and summarizing. The end matter of the volume contains the usual references.

In this volume, we have not offered a print *Commentary* as we did in *English in Today's Research World*, but this is available online at www.press.umich.edu/esl/comsite/ETRW/. Vera Irwin joins us as a co-author of the Commentary.

A volume of this kind raises complex issues of audience design, many of which we continue to struggle with. Instructors and tutors will likely have their own agendas and priorities, depending on whether they are assisting writers with English as a first or an additional language, which part of the world they are working in, or whether they are dealing with a group of people from the same discipline or from a number of disciplines. We therefore suggest an *à la carte* approach to the material we have presented, selecting and supplementing as seems most appropriate.

As in our other University of Michigan textbooks, we have tried to offer material from a wide range of disciplines. No one individual, whether an instructor or an individual using the volume for self-reference, is likely to be entirely happy with our selection. In this regard, we do urge users to be open-minded even when faced with research texts that look really quite distant from those they are most familiar with; often, we feel, there is something to be learned from the contrasts with those more familiar texts. After all, after we have visited a foreign country, we typically return with greater insight into our own.

We have also been thinking about genre—more specifically the type of genre in which an LR can occur. Here, we have given most space to student genres, such as LRs per se, dissertation proposals, and dissertations. However, we have by no means excluded reviewing the literature sections of research articles.

A final matter of audience design is indeed how we balance the needs of a class or a series of workshops and the needs of a graduate student or scholar using this volume on his or her own. We have tried to do this with a mix of activities; those more closed-ended tasks (the majority) can be undertaken by anybody—and, if wished, checked against the responses. In a class situation, many of the exercises are best done in pairs or groups of three.