Literature Review Notes

The following is a list of common errors that I saw in the literature reviews.

- A literature review, while discussing previous research, is still a thesis-driven paper. The research that you discuss should support a clearly stated thesis. Like any paper, a literature review should have a clear introduction that introduces you topic you to your audience and a conclusion that summarizes your main points and arguments. Additionally, your paragraphs should have clear topic sentences (main points) and transitions to progress smoothly from one idea to another.

- A literature review should not just report background research and what others found and think. You should have your own ideas and integration of the various articles that you looked and evaluated.

- In general, you should cite the author(s) and year of an article the first time you discuss it in a paragraph. If you talk about the same article in the same paragraph, you don’t need to recite it unless it is not clear which article you are discussing. If there is more and two authors, you need to write out the names of all the authors unless there are more than 7) the first time you cite it, but after the first time, you can cite the first author, *et al*.

- When discussing each of your articles, whether they are theoretical or experimental, consider the level of detail that your reader needs to see how it supports your thesis. Any extraneous detail will muddle the main point of your argument. Likewise, not enough detail will leave your reader confused and asking more questions than you are answering.

- Generally in psychology, you do not need to make extensive use of direct quotes as you do in the humanities. In most cases, you can weave other authors’ ideas and concepts into your paper more seamlessly when you use your own words to express their ideas in a manner that supports your thesis. Only use direct quotes when the author is discussing a specific observation, as in a case study, or when the author has stated something so well and concisely that you couldn’t possibly describe it better (this is rare!).

- What is a running head? Publishers use this as the short title that appears at the top (or bottom) of the page when the article is actually printed. It can differ from what you put at the top of each of your pages, but does not need to. The short title at the top of each of your pages is merely there to aid your reader(s) if the pages become separated.

- You can’t “prove” things using statistics; you can only disprove them.

- Generally, in writing about influences and causation, “effect” is a noun and “affect” is a verb. (“Affect” can also be a noun, meaning emotion or feeling, and “effect” can also be a verb, meaning to accomplish or achieve.)

- *I.e.* is short for the Latin *id est*, which means “that is.” *E.g.* is short for the Latin *exempli gratia*, which means “for example.” In APA style, you need to have a comma after either *i.e.* or *e.g.*

- In your reference list, the name of the article or book chapter is in lower case letters (except the first word and the first word after a colon). The name of the journal or book (where the article or chapter was published) has every word capitalized.

- In general, try to avoid using “It is” or “There are” to start a sentence. Usually, “it” and “there” don’t refer to anything and simply make your sentence wordier than necessary. For example, “It is possible that environmental context affects memory.” could be stated more concisely as “Environmental context could affect memory.”