Writing Literature Reviews in Psychology: Script for Video 02.1

This presentation supports the second module and Chapter 2 in Galavan’s *Writing Literature Reviews*, fifth edition. As I mentioned in the introductory presentation, I will be talking about the entire book, to support students at various levels of experience and preparation. But because this chapter is, one, rather brief and two, it covers both the kind of reviews you’re likely to write in advanced psychology courses as well as the kind of projects people tackle in graduate school, I will be focusing on the former: medium-length, focused literature reviews.

So let’s begin!

**Writing a Literature Review as a Term Paper for a Class.**

Galavan starts this chapter with some sobering, but accurate observations. It’s likely that you will be asked to conduct a literature review with little or no guidance from an advanced-course instructor. This is, in part, because they assume you already know how to do this: it’s what you learned in PSYC 109, after all! But in addition to that observation, Galavan gives basic, but very sound, advice: plan ahead; assume things will take longer than you expect; when in doubt, ask.

Notice that he also breaks the process up into 4 steps, and these are somewhat in conformance with the way it is done in my version of PSYC 109. The major difference, though, is that you will be spending more on the order of 1-2 weeks. However, the scope of the project is probably a bit more modest than what you’re likely to see in a 200-level psychology course. And another difference between Galavan’s approach and mine is the addition of peer feedback at every step of the way.

**Writing a Literature Review for a Thesis or Dissertation.**

I am mostly going to skip this section of the book, but I’d invite you to consider it if you decide that you are going to do an undergraduate honors thesis. Much of what you would learn in preparing for such an ambitious project is summarized in this brief outline of the process. And an important difference—along with the expectation that it will be longer—is that it will likely stretch over 2 or 3 semesters (or more).

**Writing a Literature Review for a Research Article.**

If a thesis or dissertation seem unlikely, then working on a research article’s literature-review section may seem preposterous. Actually, no. Helping out with this aspect of the research-publication endeavor is one of the most potentially rewarding opportunities you might enjoy while a student at UVM. There are many active researchers in my department, and most of them recruit undergraduates to work in their labs. Even if you aren’t majoring in psychological science, this is an amazing opportunity as many of these people are literally world famous. Plus, they’re really nice and incredibly smart.
Assignments for Module 2.

Finally, in this module’s assignments, you are going to continue to analyze sample literature-review articles. In general, as we progress, they are getting longer and more complex. But as you gain familiarity with this type of text, I would also invite you to take note of your own physical reaction to them: do you like what you’re reading? Is the writing style something that you find appealing? If so, why? Going back to Kathryn’s sage observation (that writers are readers) a big part of becoming a writer in a particular literary form (or genre, to get all fancy) is literally imitating. Not copying, but absorbing the style of writers that please you.