

the Writing Centers at Saint Mary's

Winona and Minneapolis

The Literature Matrix

A literature review is an analysis of the current research on a specific topic, including controversies and areas of consensus, that will help you to answer your research question.

A literature review is not just a summary of the research. What makes a literature review unique is synthesis, which requires you to compare and contrast the ideas of several authors, discussing where they agree, disagree, or build on each others' work. As you write your literature review, imagine you are reporting on a conversation among experts in the field, who are addressing the same issue but have different viewpoints or research findings (it might even help to visualize them sitting around a table, engaging in a lively debate).

To help you keep track of the articles you read, we suggest using a graphic organizer called a literature review matrix (an example of which is provided below). The literature matrix will help you to limit the amount of information you need to work with. In a 15-page article, for example, maybe only a few paragraphs pertain to your research topic. On your matrix, you'll note only the ideas that address your research question, making your writing process more manageable. The notes on your matrix will help you see how the authors' ideas compare—how they "talk to" one another.

As you fill out your matrix, themes—subtopics that are addressed by more than one author—will start to emerge. You will use these themes to create your headings. Under those headings you will identify the themes you uncovered in your research, and explain how they relate to your question. As you research, take brief notes that you can then insert into the blank cells.

Along the left column of the matrix, write your proposed themes. (If you don't know what your themes will be, leave these blank until you read the research, and fill in as you go.) Note that in the example matrix, the themes are written as questions.

Write the names of the authors of each study across the top of the matrix.

You might need to expand your matrix as you review more studies. You can expand by taping pages together, or creating your matrix in Excel and adding rows and columns.

How does screen time affect the mental and physical health of

Topic	Source A Straatmann et al., 2016	Source B Bucksch et al., 2016	Source C Triand, Wong, & Faulstich, 2015	Source D Wethington, Han, & Sheng, 2013	Source E Craig, Melnyk, McHenry, Di Ciano, & Wilkney (2014)	Source F Sugrue, Mansfield, & Isensee (2016)	
Study Purpose	to evaluate whether initial poor psychological well-being in early adulthood is associated with the onset and persistence of insufficient activity and occupational recommendations 22 months later (p. 2)	to examine temporal trends in leisure time TV viewing and computer use among adolescents aged 12-18 years from 2004-2010	to examine the independent effects of PA & screen time on mental health, school achievement and academic achievement in a representative sample of youth & adolescents	to examine the effect of exceeding and screen time recommendations on mental health, school achievement and academic achievement in a representative sample of youth & adolescents	to examine the effect of exceeding and screen time recommendations on mental health, school achievement and academic achievement in a representative sample of youth & adolescents	to examine the effect of exceeding and screen time recommendations on mental health, school achievement and academic achievement in a representative sample of youth & adolescents	to examine the effect of exceeding and screen time recommendations on mental health, school achievement and academic achievement in a representative sample of youth & adolescents
Screen Time	Only about 20% of teens get more than the suggested amount a day of MVPA. About 65% of adolescents watch more than 2 hours of TV per day.	While research showed that there has been a decrease in TV watching among adolescents, overall STB use increased over the 2 years per day and in the use of computers and other devices.	TEENS spend almost 8 hours per day on STBs.	TEENS spend 7.5 hours on STBs daily, with over half of this time being TV watching (p. 624).	Total STB use increased to 18.75 hours a day when simultaneous use is accounted for.	Over half of teens exceed the recommended amount of screen time every day.	
Themes	(1.1) Has it increased? why or why not? (1.2) How much time do teens spend on screens? (1.3) What kind of screens? (1.4) How much is too much?	Changing (increasing?)	As you research, take brief notes that you can then insert into the blank cells. See our learning module on this process.	The movement to online and portable technologies means that adolescents are spending less time on offline STBs.	One reason parents should be concerned is that...	Higher screen time was associated with...	

You can anticipate what themes will emerge and label those in advance of your reading. Do leave some blanks for surprises—when authors bring up ideas you haven't thought about before.

