

Building the Foundation: Conducting a Critical Literature Review

Welcome to Week 2 of our academic research journey. Today, we'll explore the essential components of conducting an effective literature review - from understanding its purpose to mastering source evaluation techniques. This foundational skill will serve as the backbone of your research projects throughout your academic career.



Purpose and Importance of Literature Reviews

A literature review serves as the intellectual foundation of your research by:

- Establishing what is already known in your field
- Identifying patterns, gaps, and contradictions in existing research
- Positioning your work within the scholarly conversation
- Demonstrating your understanding of relevant theories and methodologies
- Providing context and justification for your research question



Locating Academic Sources



Academic Databases

JSTOR and EBSCO provide access to peer-reviewed journals across disciplines. Use advanced search filters to narrow results by publication date, methodology, or subject area.



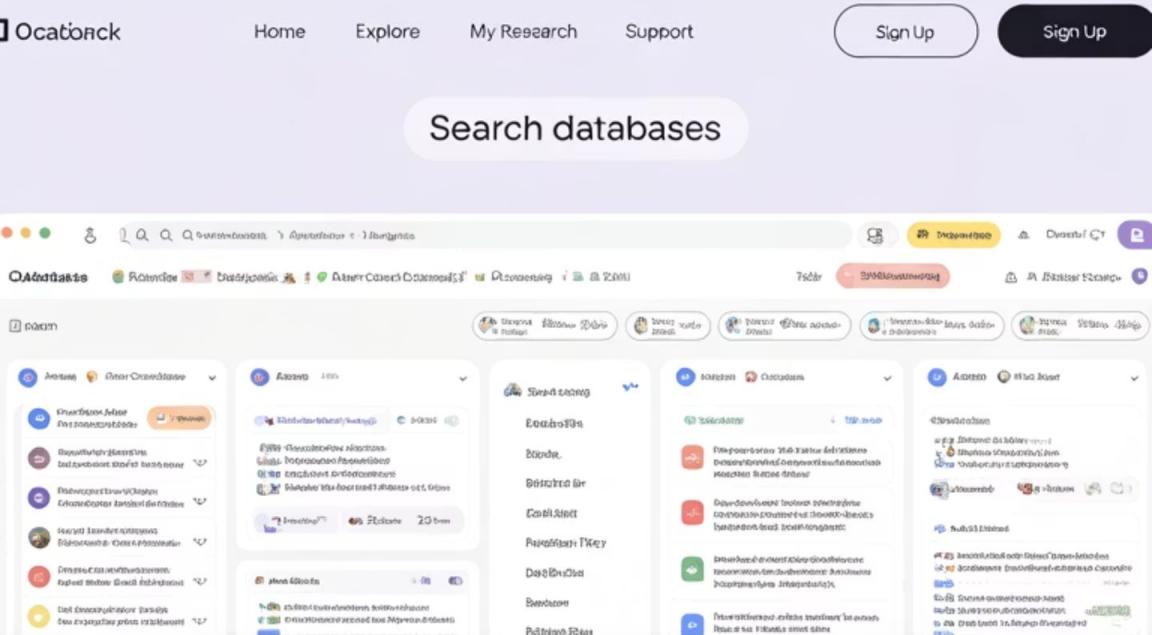
Google Scholar

Offers broader coverage including conference papers and books. Link your university library for full-text access and use citation alerts to track new publications.

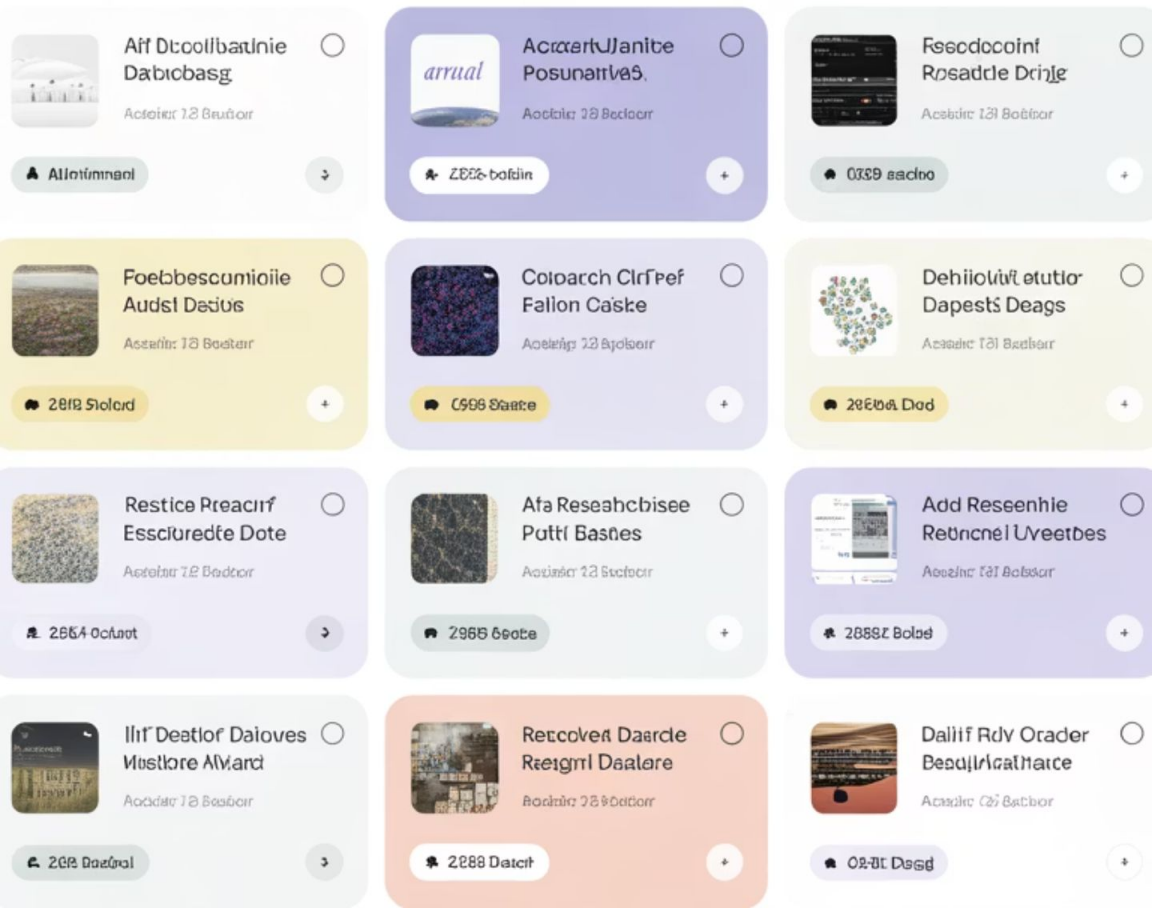


Library Resources

University libraries provide specialized databases, interlibrary loans, and research consultations with subject librarians who can guide your search strategy.



Search Databases



Reading and Summarizing Journal Articles

Effective Reading Strategies

- Skim abstract, introduction and conclusion first
- Identify key arguments and supporting evidence
- Note methodological approaches
- Highlight findings relevant to your research
- Create annotated bibliographies for each source



Identifying Gaps in Existing Research



Analyze Methodological Limitations

Examine sample sizes, research designs, and analytical approaches to identify methodological weaknesses that your research could address.



Look for Contradictory Findings

Areas where researchers disagree present opportunities for clarification or reconciliation through new research approaches.



Identify Unexplored Questions

Note when authors suggest "future research should..." or when certain populations, contexts, or variables remain unexamined.



Structuring Your Literature Review

Thematic Approach

Organize sources by concepts, theories, or variables rather than by author or publication date. This approach:

- Highlights relationships between ideas
- Facilitates comparison of different perspectives
- Creates a coherent narrative around key concepts

Chronological Approach

Trace the development of ideas over time. This approach works best when:

- Showing the evolution of a theory
- Demonstrating shifts in methodological approaches
- Highlighting how the field has progressed

Harvard Referencing Style

1 In-Text Citations

Use author-date format: (Smith, 2020) or Smith (2020) argues that... For multiple authors, use (Smith & Jones, 2020) or (Smith et al., 2020) for three or more authors.

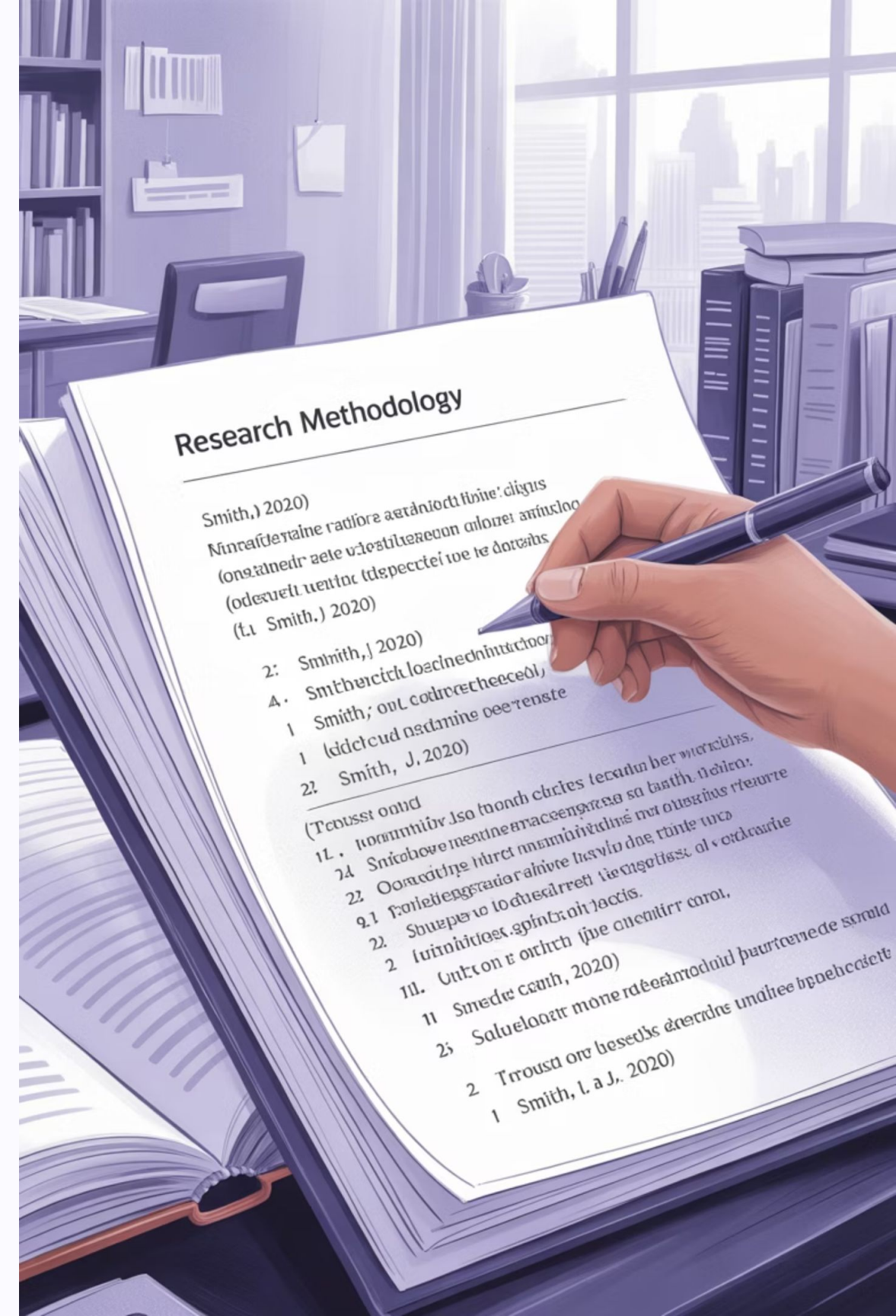
2 Reference List

Format
For journal articles: Author, A. (Year). Title of article. Journal Name, Volume(Issue), page range. DOI

For books: Author, A. (Year). Title of book. Publisher.

3 Digital Tools

Consider using reference management software like Zotero, Mendeley, or EndNote to organize sources and automatically format citations.



In-Class Activity: Evaluating Source Reliability

Authority

Who are the authors? What are their credentials? Is the publisher reputable and peer-reviewed?



Currency

When was it published? Is the information still relevant or has it been superseded?



Methodology

How was data collected? Is the sample size appropriate? Are methods clearly described?



Purpose

Why was it written? Is there bias or conflict of interest? Who was the intended audience?

