Subject: BUSINESS RESEARCH METHODS

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Program: BBA (HONS)

Semester: SUMMER 2020

**Question 1**

Explain literature review and its purpose. What are mistakes often made while writing a literature review.

***Answer:***

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature review is a comprehensive summary of previous research on a topic. The literature review surveys scholarly articles, books, and other sources relevant to a particular area of research. The review should enumerate, describe, summarize, objectively evaluate and clarify this previous research. It should give a theoretical base for the research and help you (the author) determine the nature of your research. The literature review acknowledges the work of previous researchers, and in so doing, assures the reader that your work has been well conceived. It is assumed that by mentioning a previous work in the field of study, that the author has read, evaluated, and assimilated that work into the work at hand.

A literature review creates a "landscape" for the reader, giving her or him a full understanding of the developments in the field. This landscape informs the reader that the author has indeed assimilated all (or the vast majority of) previous, significant works in the field into her or his research.

"In writing the literature review, the purpose is to convey to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. The literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (e.g. your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing, or your argumentative thesis). It is not just a descriptive list of the material available, or a set of summaries.

**PURPOSE**

* In general, the literature review should:
* provide a context for the research
* identify seminal works and scholars in the field
* acknowledge existing theories, points of view, hypotheses, etc. in the field of research
* justify the research
* clear up misconceptions about previous research
* ensure the research has not been done before (or if it is repeated, that it is marked as a "replication study")
* show where the research fits into the existing body of knowledge
* enable the researcher to learn from previous theory on the subject
* illustrate how the subject has been previously studied
* highlight flaws in previous research
* outline gaps in previous research
* show that the work is adding to the understanding and knowledge of the field
* help refine the topic, refocus the topic, or even contribute to the topic's evolution

**MISTAKES OFTEN MADE WHILE WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW.**

1. **Too descriptive**

A literature review must go beyond a mere summary of what was reported by other researchers. Look for any drawbacks or limitations in their methodology. Comment on why you may be reluctant to trust their conclusions – perhaps because of a small sample size or vague measurements. That’s the criticism that all tutors want. ⠀

1. **Lack of quality sources**

You are expected to use at least 10 scholarly references per 1,000 words. Most of these should be peer-reviewed articles published within the last three years, with occasional theoretical books and research reports. Textbooks, magazines, newspapers and blogs are not appropriate sources for a literature review.

1. **A by-article structure**

It’s always a temptation to discuss one article in one paragraph and then proceed to another – this is the easiest way to write a literature review! But do resist it. Along with descriptiveness, the by-article structure is what most tutors disapprove of strongly. Compare and contrast the findings from three or more articles in each paragraph.

1. **No link to research question**

Using a good range of scholarly sources and evaluating them critically is not enough. Explain how these findings help you answer your research question, what they teach you about your topic. ⠀

1. **Un-grounded statements**

When critiquing the work of others, it’s easy to become judgmental. Back any statements you make with a reference to other sources so your readers can see you’re not just expressing a personal opinion. For example, “Collecting performance data from employees themselves is a problem in this study because it could have resulted in a same-source bias (Saunders et al., 2016)”.

**Question 2**

**How to you make a research question original and different from others.**

***Answer:***

**What is a research question?**

A research question is the question around which you center your research. It should be:

* **Clear:** 
  + it provides enough specifics that one’s audience can easily understand its purpose without needing additional explanation.
* **Focused**:
  + it is narrow enough that it can be answered thoroughly in the space the writing task allows.
* **Concise**:
  + it is expressed in the fewest possible words.
* **Complex**:
  + it is not answerable with a simple “yes” or “no,” but rather requires synthesis and analysis of ideas and sources prior to composition of an answer.
* **Arguable**:
  + its potential answers are open to debate rather than accepted facts.

You should ask a question about an issue that you are genuinely curious and/or passionate about.

The question you ask should be developed for the discipline you are studying. A question appropriate for Biology, for instance, is different from an appropriate one in Political Science or Sociology. If you are developing your question for a course other than first-year composition, you may want to discuss your ideas for a research question with your professor.

**Why is a research question essential to the research process?**

Research questions help writers focus their research by providing a path through the research and writing process. The specificity of a well-developed research question helps writers avoid the “all-about” paper and work toward supporting a specific, arguable thesis.

**STEPS TO DEVELOPING A RESEARCH QUESTION:**

1. Choose an interesting general topic. Most professional researchers focus on topics they are genuinely interested in studying. Writers should choose a broad topic about which they genuinely would like to know more. An example of a general topic might be “Slavery in the American South” or “Films of the 1930s.”
2. Do some preliminary research on your general topic. Do a few quick searches in current periodicals and journals on your topic to see what’s already been done and to help you narrow your focus. What issues are scholars and researchers discussing, when it comes to your topic? What questions occur to you as you read these articles?
3. Consider your audience. For most college papers, your audience will be academic, but always keep your audience in mind when narrowing your topic and developing your question. Would that particular audience be interested in the question you are developing?
4. Start asking questions. Taking into consideration all of the above, start asking yourself open-ended “how” and “why” questions about your general topic. For example, “Why were slave narratives effective tools in working toward the abolishment of slavery?” or “How did the films of the 1930s reflect or respond to the conditions of the Great Depression?”
5. Evaluate your question. After you’ve put a question or even a couple of questions down on paper, evaluate these questions to determine whether they would be effective research questions or whether they need more revising and refining.
   * Is your research question clear? With so much research available on any given topic, research questions must be as clear as possible in order to be effective in helping the writer direct his or her research.
   * Is your research question focused? Research questions must be specific enough to be well covered in the space available.
   * Is your research question complex? Research questions should not be answerable with a simple “yes” or “no” or by easily-found facts. They should, instead, require both research and analysis on the part of the writer. They often begin with “How” or “Why.”
6. Begin your research. After you’ve come up with a question, think about the possible paths your research could take. What sources should you consult as you seek answers to your question? What research process will ensure that you find a variety of perspectives and responses to your question?

**SAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

* **Unclear**:
* How should social networking sites address the harm they cause?
* **Clear**:
  + What action should social networking sites like Myspace and Facebook take to protect users’ personal information and privacy?

The unclear version of this question doesn’t specify which social networking sites or suggest what kind of harm the sites might be causing. It also assumes that this “harm” is proven and/or accepted. The clearer version specifies sites (Myspace and Facebook), the type of potential harm (privacy issues), and who may be experiencing that harm (users). A strong research question should never leave room for ambiguity or interpretation.

* **Unfocused**:
  + What is the effect on the environment from global warming?
* **Focused**:
  + What is the most significant effect of glacial melting on the lives of penguins in Antarctica?

The unfocused research question is so broad that it couldn’t be adequately answered in a book-length piece, let alone a standard college-level paper. The focused version narrows down to a specific effect of global warming (glacial melting), a specific place (Antarctica), and a specific animal that is affected (penguins). It also requires the writer to take a stance on which effect has the greatest impact on the affected animal. When in doubt, make a research question as narrow and focused as possible.

* **Too simple:** 
  + How are doctors addressing diabetes in the U.S.?
* **Appropriately Complex:** 
  + What main environmental, behavioral, and genetic factors predict whether Americans will develop diabetes, and how can these commonalities be used to aid the medical community in prevention of the disease?

The simple version of this question can be looked up online and answered in a few factual sentences; it leaves no room for analysis. The more complex version is written in two parts; it is thought provoking and requires both significant investigation and evaluation from the writer. As a general rule of thumb, if a quick Google search can answer a research question, it’s likely not very effective.

**Question 3**

Explain positivism and interpretivism in your own words.

***Answer:***

**POSITIVISM**

1. Positivists prefer quantitative methods such as social surveys, structured questionnaires and official statistics because these have good reliability and representativeness.
2. Positivists see society as shaping the individual and believe that ‘social facts’ shape individual action.
3. The positivist tradition stresses the importance of doing quantitative research such as large-scale surveys in order to get an overview of society as a whole and to uncover social trends, such as the relationship between educational achievement and social class. This type of sociology is more interested in trends and patterns rather than individuals.
4. Positivists also believe that sociology can and should use the same methods and approaches to study the social world that “natural” sciences such as biology and physics use to investigate the physical world. By adopting “scientific” techniques sociologists should be able, eventually, to uncover the laws that govern societies just as scientists have discovered the laws that govern the physical world.
5. In positivist research, sociologists tend to look for relationships, or ‘correlations’ between two or more variables. This is known as the comparative method.

**BASICALLY POSITIVISM**

Positivism aligns itself with the methods of the natural sciences. It is associated with deductive logical reasoning (starting with initial theories or hypothesis’ and working towards the more specific details). It tends to be very black and white. It either is not it isn’t. It can be proved or it can’t. It does not lend itself particularly well to areas that are not so black and white in nature, such as the study of society.

Positivism uses only research data that is verifiable and is collected in a value-free manner, enabling objective results to be generated and general scientific laws to be created. It often uses numbers. A number is a number, it is not subjective in any way. Calculations and equations can be easily developed.

You can also think of it in terms of a scientific experiment.

**FOR EXAMPLE**

We need the three elements of oxygen, heat and fuel in order for fire to occur. If one element is missing, there is no fire. This is not up for discussion. It is a black and white fact.

**INTERPRETIVISM**

1. An Interpretivist approach to social research would be much more qualitative, using methods such as unstructured interviews or participant observation
2. Interpretivists, or anti-positivists argue that individuals are not just puppets who react to external social forces as Positivists believe.
3. According to Interpretivists individuals are intricate and complex and different people experience and understand the same ‘objective reality’ in very different ways and have their own, often very different, reasons for acting in the world, thus scientific methods are not appropriate.
4. Interpretivist research methods derive from ‘social action theory ‘
5. Interactivity actually criticize ‘scientific sociology’ (Positivism) because many of the statistics it relies on are themselves socially constructed.
6. Interpretivists argue that in order to understand human action we need to achieve ‘Verstehen‘, or empathetic understanding – we need to see the world through the eyes of the actors doing the acting.

**BASICALLY INTERPRETIVISM**

Interpretivism lends itself well to studies which have a lot of grey areas, like society, for example. Understanding why or how somebody feels or behaves cannot be achieved through the analysis of numbers. Instead it requires in-depth assessment of words, actions and behaviors. An interpretivist researcher concentrates on the meanings that people bring to situations and behavior and the ways that they use this to interpret the world.

What’s more, is that an interpretative researcher believes that reality and the individual who observes it are inseparable. This is because a person’s views of the world are inextricably linked to their life experiences. Take my experience as a TEFL teacher,

**FOR EXAMPLE**

Having been educated in the UK, I had a perception of the way that lessons should be taught based on my own personal experiences. This would likely be very different to someone who was educated in a different environment, such as rural India.