

**Systematic Approaches to a Successful Literature Review  
2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. By A. Booth, A. Sutton and D. Papaioannou.  
London, Sage Publications Ltd. ISBN 978-14739-1245-8;  
ISBN 978-1-4739-1246-5 (PBK)**

Reviewed by Joe Gazdula

There is a need for a quality interactive text to help structure literature reviews and provide guidance for students and researchers. This is such a text. As part of the researcher 'toolkit' this book will prove beneficial to students, researchers, teachers of research, and research supervisors, but I would suggest it is targeted at more experienced researchers, due to the nature and broad number of techniques it covers, so readers will need to choose which are relevant to their particular purpose. There is also an interactive companion website which provides activities and information making at least some of the package useable for undergraduate researchers but they will have to be discerning in its use or face being overwhelmed. The author comments that the book aims at giving researchers the ability to do a systematic literature review rather than a standardised one and this recognition, that reviews are often very specific to the researcher, is important. The book is sectional in nature with each chapter dealing with specific aspects of the literature review and owes many of its techniques to project management.

The uniform layout of the chapters is helpful with Key Principles and Approaches used at the beginning to consolidate the topic area. The 'In a Nutshell' summaries save time by identifying key points and helps students and researchers get a quick picture of how to pick out the approaches pertinent to themselves. Examples come mainly from the health sector but the ideas should be applicable across most other subjects. Review Challenges help to consolidate themes and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) cover many of the common problems encountered by researchers early in their research. The Further Reading section is quite diverse and contains references to books from specific subject sectors with health being the predominant one.

While not every chapter is likely to be of use to every student or researcher most will find at least some helpful and a couple essential. The first four chapters essentially

cover terminology and planning but the recognition that methods and methodology should be part of the literature review is a key point, and often not well covered in my own experience. Chapters five to seven will be essential reading for many and clearly outline how to define the scope of the literature review, do qualified systematic literature searches and assess the evidence found. These are super sections for all researchers but I suspect early career researchers will get most benefit as they structure the search process into a series of logical stages: Initial Search, Conduct Search, Bibliographical Search, Verification, and Documentation. These are dealt with in some depth outlining the types of literature and how to deal with them in turn. The final chapters deal with, synthesising and analysing quantitative and qualitative data and cover standard fare such as synthesising information, extracting data and approaches to reviewing documentation. There is a section on narrative approaches in the quantitative section which could be a little confusing and I re-read this a number of times to contextualise it, but the spoiler here was the way the Cochrane Collaboration centred on medical research began to be used as a qualifying reference on a regular basis.

To summarise, this is a comprehensive book on reviewing literature for students and researchers. It outlines a broad range of techniques and will certainly help to produce a structured literature review. It will benefit more experienced researchers most of all, and I suspect early career researchers may need to pick out sections to use carefully and ensure they are relevant to them, something which is supported with the complementary website. The really great feature of this book is the way it uses examples throughout the text to bring what could be a dull aspect of research to life. There are a lot of examples in the text using medical research protocols but this should not deter a wider audience as these have proven to be transferable across subjects and are often at the forefront of many research approaches. Overall, a very good book which will really help readers to produce a quality literature review.