

Review

Sara Efrat Efron and Ruth Ravid. (2019). *Writing a literature review: A practical guide*. New York, NY: Guilford Press. 298 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4625-3689-4

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With this book, Sarah Efrat Efron and Ruth Ravid provide an invaluable resource for researchers of all kinds. As it is both detailed and straightforward, students, teachers and researchers will find this book ideal to have on their shelves as a guide, reference, and source of ideas whenever they are required to undertake a literature review or to teach others how to do so.

A literature review can be many things. This book covers a range of interpretations of what a literature review is and what purposes it might serve, all the while providing tips on questions literature review authors might ask of their task, which expands the applicability of the book to almost any situation or context in which acknowledgement and analysis of literature is required. I look forward to drawing on it both as a writer of academic works and research grant proposals, and as a teacher of graduate students beginning the journey of engagement with literature for academic purposes through to writing their own research proposals for higher degrees. The book would also be

valuable for government officials and community organisations alike. The book provides rich description of what a good literature review looks like and how a writer might go about developing one. This helps in the writing of a high-quality, fit-for-purpose literature review, and in making a sound judgement when analysing policy, applying for funding, or reporting on progress towards a particular goal such as a policy objective or step in an implementation plan.

The book is set out in 12 chapters. The first chapter addresses the question of “What is a literature review” and explains why literature reviews are undertaken. Chapter 2 describes different orientations to a literature review (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) and different approaches that may be taken (systematic, traditional-narrative, and hermeneutic-phenomenological). These two sets of dimensions provide key reference points throughout the book, as the numerous and nuanced processes involved in creating a literature review are explored in detail in Chapters 3–11. The final chapter brings these processes to a conclusion, setting out the product—the literature review—and ways to assess and enhance its quality. The different orientations and approaches referred to throughout the book play a central role in the value this book offers. The authors carefully highlight and address the impact of the ways the different orientations and approaches intersect and require different responses from the author. This detail renders the book useful in an array of contexts and purposes.

The book is also accessible at different levels. It successfully deals with the complexity of a literature review and offers straightforward, stepwise, easy-to-follow strategies for dealing with the complexity. A novice literature review author can commence the task with confidence. Academic writing teachers, public servants, and social-service practitioners can all find detailed guidance on specific aspects of creating a literature review, which may expand their capacity to

teach others. A selection of learning and practice tasks are available that can be offered to their students to support their learning. Early and mid-career academics may find new and valuable insights that enhance their literature review writing in specific context and for specific purposes.

The book is very well written. It successfully deals with complex issues by using straightforward language and clear expression and by providing a number of ways for the reader to access key ideas. Diagrams and tables set out information in addition to the textual descriptions and explanations. “To do” lists and group-work ideas add to the range of options for progressing a literature review. A stand-out strength of the book is the authors’ linking throughout the book to where helpful information may be found in other chapters. ‘What’s next’ sections at the end of each chapter, chapter summaries containing numbered key points, and orienting the reader at the start of the next chapter all contribute to supporting the developing literature review writer. These approaches make it easy to follow the rich information the authors provide.

Writing the Literature Review: A Practical Guide is a book I am very pleased to have on my shelves. While primarily intended for student use, this book has the capacity to enhance learning, teaching and practice for students, practitioners, and academics alike. This broader appeal is enabled by the multiple levels at which the authors invite both deep understanding and critique of literature review writing across a variety of research orientations and approaches, covering both the processes involved in literature review writing and the product. It is well worth lingering in this book. While it may appear at first glance to be overly complicating the concept of a literature review, it is overwhelmingly successful in helping the reader understand the value of a high-quality, fit-for-purpose review and how to achieve it.