THE MATRIX METHOD FOR LITERATURE REVIEWS

What is the Matrix Method, and why should I use it?

Using a review matrix enables you to quickly compare and contrast articles in order to determine the scope of research across time. A review matrix can help you more easily spot differences and similarities between journal articles about a research topic. While they may be helpful in any discipline, review matrices are especially helpful for health sciences literature reviews covering the complete scope of a research topic over time. This guide focuses on the review matrix step in the literature review process and offers tips on how to use it effectively.

Organize your sources

Once you complete your research, organize your source by date in order to make it easier to see changes in research over time.

Begin by creating the blank matrix. The matrices can be easily constructed using table-making software such as Microsoft Excel, Word or OneNote, Google Sheets, or Numbers. Every review matrix should have the same first three column headings: (1) authors, title, and journal, (2) publication year, and (3) purpose.

Authors, title, journal	Year pub	Purpose
Martin, JE et. al. "A DNA vaccine for Ebola virus is safe and	2006	Determine safety and immunogenicity of Ebola vaccine in

Be aware that it may be difficult to determine purpose from just a cursory review of the article. In some cases, it may be necessary to first read the paper fully to identify its purpose.

Choose your remaining column topics

Next, carefully read all your articles. Note any important issues you identify. The following broad categories provide some suggestions for determining your own subject headings:

- Methodological: Methodology is often an important question. For example, if you are looking at tests of an Ebola vaccine beyond human subjects, it will be important to note what type of animal the test was carried out on, i.e. macaques or mice.
- Content-specific: Consider noting what was actually studied. For example, when looking at the effectiveness of traditional Chinese medicine in the treatment of illnesses, it would be important to note what illness was being studied.

- Geographical: It may be important to note where the research was completed. For example, if you want to compare the effects of the AIDS epidemic in different countries, you would use country as a column heading.

There are many ways to choose your column headings, and these are just a few suggestions. As you create your own matrix, choose column headings that support your research question and goals.

Tips

- Do not include column headings that are explicit in your research question. For example, if you are looking at drug use in adolescents, do not include a column heading for age of study participants. If the answer will be the same for every study, it's generally a bad choice for a column heading.
- Do not try to fully complete a review matrix before reading the articles. Reading the articles is an important way to discern the nuances between studies.

Adapted from David Nolfi, "Matrix Method for Literature Review: The Review Matrix," Duquesne University, https://guides.library.duq.edu/matrix, 2020.

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