Preface

Each year, the results of tens of thousands of studies are printed in journals, books, magazines, and on the Web. Hundreds of studies have been conducted, for example, to find out the effects of video games and Internet browsing on the behavior of children, if coaching improves SAT scores, and if depression should be treated with medicine, behavioral therapy, or both.

How can an individual identify and make sense of the voluminous amount of currently available information on every topic in education, health, social welfare, psychology, and business? What standards can be used to distinguish good and poor studies?

This book is for anyone who wants answers to these questions. Its primary purposes are to teach readers to identify, interpret, and analyze the published and unpublished research literature. Specifically, readers are instructed in how to do the following:

- Identify valid online bibliographic/articles databases
- Determine how to search for literature using key words, descriptors, identifiers, and thesauruses
- Use Boolean operators to refine a search
- Identify and deal with unpublished studies
- Organize the research literature by using bibliographic software
- Set inclusion and exclusion criteria to produce useful and valid information
- Justify a method for identifying and reviewing only the “highest quality” literature
- Prepare a structured abstraction form
- Ensure and measure the reliability and validity of the review
• Synthesize and report results as part of proposals and papers or as a stand-alone report
• Evaluate qualitative research studies
• Conduct and evaluate descriptive literature reviews
• Understand and evaluate meta-analytic research

The book provides flow diagrams to assist the reader in linking each step of the review to the contents of each chapter and offers exercises linked to the goals.

New in the Third Edition

• Nearly a hundred new online examples and references from the social, behavioral, and health sciences
• A revised and updated list of online article databases
• Case studies in the use of major online databases (e.g., the Web of Science)
• Expansion of the exercises at the end of the chapter to include more online searching
• Clarification of some of the basic concepts of research that are essential in making judgments about the quality of research methods
• More examples and clearer explanations of the differences between research design validity (internal and external) and measurement validity
• Introduction of the major available formal systems for evaluating the literature’s methodological quality
• More qualitative research examples and information on how to evaluate their quality
• Additional examples of how to write up reviews and how others have done it

The third edition is also different from the others because it contains nearly 100 PowerPoint slides linked to each of the five chapters. The slides are available at www.sagepub.com/finklit.
This book is written for all who want to uncover the current status of knowledge about social, educational, business, and health problems. This includes students, researchers, marketers, planners, and policy makers who design and manage public and private agencies, conduct studies, and prepare strategic plans and grant proposals. Every single grant proposal, for instance, requires applicants to provide evidence that they know the literature and can justify the need for the grant on the basis of what is and is not known about a topic. Also, strategic and program planners are interested in finding out what is known about “best practices” in order to define programmatic missions and plan activities as diverse as marketing goods and services, preventing child abuse, and setting up school voucher systems. Any individual with admittance to a virtual or real library can use this book.

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