Teaching Literature Reviews to EAP Students
by [Jen Spearie](#)

Writing a literature review is a daunting task for native speakers, much less English language learners (ELLs). In a recent English for academic purposes (EAP) course preparing graduate students for research in their respective fields, I used Swales and Feak's (2012) *Academic Writing for Graduate Students.* Although I found the text extremely useful, there was a very brief and incomplete section on writing literature reviews.

Thus, I devised the following process to familiarize students with the conventions of literature reviews, to help them analyze their own research to find the appropriate organizational style, and finally to enable them to write their own literature reviews. The objective of this sequence of classes was to assist students in creating a literature review with a clear narrative thread rather than simply listing and summarizing a number of sources. By following a step-by-step process, students will begin to feel more comfortable and confident with this type of writing. Students will complete this process in brief with a number of shared sources and then will repeat the same process in more detail for their own sources related to their field of study.

Class 1: Literature Review Basics

Objectives
- Students will learn to identify the characteristics and purpose of literature reviews.
- Students will be able to differentiate annotated bibliographies from literature reviews.

Materials
3–4 academic articles from different disciplines that each contain a literature review. Upload them on the course webpage. If you are not in a lab class, you can bring copies for each group.

1. Break students into groups of three or four and ask them to skim the articles to address the following questions (30 min):

    a. Where does each literature review begin and end?
    b. Highlight the sources mentioned in each literature review (citations).
    c. How is a literature review different from an annotated bibliography?
    d. What do you think is the purpose of a literature review?
    e. "A literature review should tell a story." What do you think this means?

2. Use the remaining class time to review the group work and share their responses.

Class 2: Organization

Objectives
- Students will learn to recognize organizational styles of literature reviews.
- Students will be able to identify connections between sources on a topic.
- Students will determine an appropriate organization for a literature review and justify their choices.

Materials
5–6 short summaries or abstracts of sources on the same topic. I used summaries of academic texts on pp. 341–342 in *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (Swales & Feak, 2012).

1. For this lesson, I adapted a portion of *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (Swales & Feak, 2012). Spend time explaining the various organizational styles of a literature review. If possible, use the sources from the previous class to point out some different organizations of literature reviews. (20 minutes)

    a. General → specific
    b. Specific → general
    c. Problem → solution
    d. Chronological order (time or sequence)
    e. Themes/factors/subtopics (listing)
    f. Cause and effect
    g. Stages or process
    h. Other (combination of the above)

2. Break students into groups of three or four and ask them to read the summaries of the sources. (30 minutes)

3. Ask students to try to find connections between the sources. Which ones would they group together and why? Be sure to mention that sources can be cited in multiple places in a literature review depending on relevant topics.

4. Tell students they will need to choose an organizational style for their literature review. They should create an outline of the literature review and explain which sources they would cite for each section.

5. As a class, discuss the connections and ideas for organization and then vote on the best one. Write or type your class outline for the literature review and save it on the course website (see Appendix A for an example).

Class 3: Group Composition (Part 1)

Objectives
- Students will write a portion of a short literature review.
- Students will practice paraphrasing and reporting information from sources.
- Students will synthesize texts using comparison and contrast.
- Students will correctly use in-text citations.

Materials
- The outline of the literature review (from Class 2)
- The 5–6 short summaries or abstracts (from Class 2).

1. Divide up the literature review sections (from Class 2) into groups and ask each group to be responsible for writing a one- to three-paragraph section. If you have a large class, you might ask two to three groups to work on the same section. (50 minutes)

2. Students should focus on introducing each source with the correct citation information, reporting/paraphrasing the information from the sources, and connecting the sources with transitions. They can also use comparison and contrast to highlight the similarities and differences between the sources.

3. Collect and upload each group's section to the course website. If you had multiple groups work on the same section, keep those paragraphs together.

Class 4: Group Composition (Part 2)

Objective
Students will write introductory, transitional, and concluding sentences of a literature review.

Materials
Literature review sections written by students (from Class 3)

1. Read the group literature review sections from Class 3 and compare and contrast the paragraphs on the same topic. (20 minutes; see an example in Appendix B)

2. For each section, the group should choose the paragraph(s) that they find to be the strongest.

3. Once each group has chosen the sections of the literature review, they will need to connect them. Ask each group to write an introductory sentence that signals the beginning of the literature review and mentions the topic of the sources. Next, write transition sentences connecting the individual sections of the literature review. Finally, write a concluding sentence that signals the end of the literature review and that may point to the researcher's topic or a gap in the previous research. (30 minutes)

4. Each group should now have a complete literature review. Collect them and upload them to the course webpage. (See an example in Appendix C)

    Homework: Ask students to complete a synthesis matrix for their own sources (See Appendix D).

In following classes, students can use their individual articles and research topics to repeat this process in more detail. They can use the synthesis matrix to help them to organize the information from their sources before they write the literature review.

These steps should help to demystify the process of writing a literature review for your EAP students. After completing these activities, your students will feel more confident with the basics,

organization, and composition of this assignment. They can then successfully apply this new knowledge when writing on a topic relevant to their own fields of study.

Reference

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2012). *Academic writing for graduate students* (3rd ed.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

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Appendix A: Sample Literature Review Outline and Organization

Our class used summaries of eight research papers in *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (Swales & Feak, 2012, pp. 341–342). The papers discussed the incidence of self-citation in various fields, as well as the reasons that authors chose to cite their own research and some of the effects of self-citation.

We choose a combination of specific to general and cause and effect organizational styles. The first two topics focus on statistics and percentages, which are considered specific information. We can then use these specific examples to point to the more general topics of motivations (causes) of self-citation and the effects of self-citation.

I.   Texts focusing on percentages of self-citations in different fields
   a. Snyder & Bonzi (1989)
   b. Fowler & Aksnes (2007)
   c. Falagas & Kavvadia (2006)

II.   Individual variations of self-citation
   a. Fowler & Aksnes (2007)
   b. Phelan (1999)

III.   Motivations for self-citation
   a. Hyland (2003)
   b. Bonzi & Snyder (1991)
   c. White (2001)

IV.   Effects of self-citation
   a. Fowler and Aksmes (2007)
   b. Medoff (2006)
   c. Bonzi & Snyder (1991)

Appendix B: Literature Review

Part 1. Choose the best summary from the following.

Group 1

It was a phenomenon that self-citation decreases or increases according on different majors and disciplines. According to Fowler and Aksnes (2007), a macro study of more than half million citations to articles by Norwegian scientists in the 1981-2000 period was undertaken. The average citation rate was 11%, Although there were wide individual variations. However, patterns of self-citation in six disciplines were examined. On the other hand, Bonzi and Snyder (1991) the percentages were 15% in the physical science, 6% in the social science, and 3% in the humanities. Also, Falagas and Kavvadia (2006) reported that 17% of references in clinical science were self-citation, a figure that rose slightly to 20% in basic science.

Not only self-citation matters in terms of research but also individual variation had an impact on citation in general. According to Phalen (1999), a study of the citing practices of 56 highly cited authors in the field of the education was conducted. Only 2 of the 56 did not cite themselves over 12 year period. At the other extreme, 154 out of 280 citations (55%) received by one author were the outcome of self-citations. In addition, Fowler& Aksense (2007) stated that the autors more cited themselves the more likely they are be cited by others.

Group 2

According to Snyder and Bonzi (1989), patterns of self-citation in six disciplines were examined and 9 percent of all citations were self-citations, while the average citation rate was 11 percent based on more than half million citations from 1981 to 2000 in accordance with Norwegian Scientists Fowler and Aksnes (2007). The former study conducted that physical and social science fields used self-citations 15 and 6 percent respectively, whereas the smooth increase in science sector has been appeared from 17 to 20 percent in the 2006 research of Falagas and Kavvadia.

According to Phelan (1999), only 2 of 56 highly cited authors did not cite themselves over a 12-year period while the remaining 54 authors use self-citations 154 times out of 280. Fowler and Aksnes (2007) conducted that there is no penalty on frequent self-citing that is why authors cite themselves regardless of numbers in self-citation. They concluded that the more authors cite themselves the more likely they are to be cited by others. However, they are uncertain about the use of citations to evaluate performance. Therefore, the authors should be more cautious about how they can use self-citations in their articles considering the articles' quality.

Group 3

Authors increasingly tend to cite themselves in writing. They believe that more using of self-citations causes more other people to cite your name. There are several studies that show percentages of self-citations. According to Snyder and Bonzi (1989), patterns of self-citation in six disciples were examined. 9% of all citations were self-citations: 15% in the physical sciences, 6% in the social sciences, and 3% in the humanities. In addition, Falagas and Kavvadia (2006) found that clinical science has more self-citations with 17%. Also, Fowler and Aksnes (2007) presented a macro study of more than a half million citations to articles by Norwegian scientists

in the 1981-2000 period was undertaken. The average citation rate was 11%, although there were wide individual variations.

Despite the high percentage of self-citation in different fields, we can find individual variations in each field. Phelan (1999) wrote a study of the citing practices of 56 highly cited authors in the field of Education. Only 2 o the 56 did not cite themselves over a 12-year period. At the other extreme, 154 out of 280 citations (55%) received by one author were the outcome of self-citations. Also, Fowler and Aksnes (2007) showed that there were wide individual variations in the number of self-citations.

Part 2. Choose the best summary from the following.

Group 4

According to Hyland (2003), self-citations may arise from three kinds of motivations. First, natural result of the cumulative nature of an individual's research. Second, a need for personal gratification and finally its value as rhetorical device to increase an author's visibility and reputation. A study by Bonzi and Snyder (1991) showed that 51 authors in the natural sciences revealed only a few differences in motivation between citing oneself and citing others. White (2001) stated that the most important citer motivation is to project one's own writing and reading by linking earlier work to later work. In this sense a certain amount of self-citation is both natural and inevitable.

A study by Bonzi and Snyder (1991) showed that 51 authors in the natural sciences revealed only a few differences in motivation between citing oneself and citing others. Medoff (2006) study showed that an author's self-citation did not have a statistically significant effect on the article's total number of citations. Moreover, a macro study done by Fowler and Aksnes (2007) showed that more than a half million citation to articles by Norwegian scientist in 1981-2000 period was undertaken. Even though there were wide individual variations, the average citation rate was 11%. Especially notable, the more authors cite themselves the more likely they are to be cited by others. Much less expected, they note that there are currently no penalties for frequent self-citing. They concluded that these results question the use of citation to evaluate performance.

Group 5

There are several motivations of doing self-citation. Hyland (2003) states that self-citation may arise from three kinds of motivations: a natural result of the cumulative natural of an individual's research; a need for personal gratification' and its value as a rhetorical device to increase an author's visibility and reputation. In addition, the most important citer motivation is to project one's own writing and reading by linking earlier work to later work. In this sense, a certain amount of self-citation is both natural and inevitable (White, 2001). Bonzi and Snyder (1991) support this idea by presenting their study of 51 authors in the natural sciences, which revealed only a few differences in motivation between citing oneself and citing others.

The effect of self-citation is varied from different researchers. Medoff (2006) present his study of 400 economics articles, which shows that an author's self-citation did not have a statically significant effect on the articles' total number of citation. This idea support by Bonzi and Snyder (1991), there are only few differences in motivation between citing one-self and citing others. However, Fowler and Aksnes (2007) illustrate that the more authors cite themselves the more likely they are to be cited by others.

Group 6

Self-citers are motivated in three different ways: a natural result of cumulative nature of an individual's research, a need of personal gratification and its value as rhetorical device to increase an author's visibility and reputation (Hyland, 2003). Furthermore, White (2001) stated that the most citer motivation is to project one's own writing by linking earlier work to later work. In this sense, a certain amount of self-citation is both natural and inevitable. According to Bonzi and Snyder (1991), self-citation in the natural science showed that there are only a few differences in motivation between citing oneself and citing others.

Going from self-citation's motivation to the effects of those self-citations, Fowler and Aksmes (2007) mentioned that the more authors cite themselves the more likely they are to be cited by others. On the other hand, after study of 400 economics articles, Medoff (2006) showed that an author's self-citation didn't have statistically significant effects on that article's total number of citations. This study agrees with Bonzi and Snyder (1991) one way or another. Ultimately, Fowler and Aksmes (2007) noted that there are currently no penalties for frequent of self-citing. These results question the use of citations to evaluate performance.

Appendix C. Sample Literature Review (Written by Students)

As a result of abundance number of researchers, nowadays authors try to stand out through citing themselves in writing. They believe that more using of self-citations causes more other people to cite your name. There are several studies that show percentages of self-citations. According to Snyder and Bonzi (1989), patterns of self-citation in six disciples were examined. 9% of all citations were self-citations: 15% in the physical sciences, 6% in the social sciences, and 3% in the humanities. In addition, Falagas and Kavvadia (2006) found that clinical science has more self-citations with 17%. Also, Fowler and Aksnes (2007) presented a macro study of more than a half million citations to articles by Norwegian scientists in the 1981-2000 period was undertaken. The average citation rate was 11%, although there were wide individual variations.

Despite the high percentage of self-citation in different fields, we can find individual variations in each field. Phelan (1999) wrote a study of the citing practices of 56 highly cited authors in the field of Education. Only 2 o the 56 did not cite themselves over a 12-year period. At the other extreme, 154 out of 280 citations (55%) received by one author were the outcome of self-citations. Also, Fowler and Aksnes (2007) showed that there were wide individual variations in the number of self-citations.

There are many reasons behind using self-citation by authors .Self-citers are motivated in three different ways: a natural result of cumulative nature of an individual's research, a need of personal gratification and its value as rhetorical device to increase an author's visibility and reputation (Hyland, 2003). Furthermore, White (2001) stated that the most citer motivation is to project one's own writing by linking earlier work to later work. In this sense, a certain amount of self-citation is both natural and inevitable. According to Bonzi and Snyder (1991), self-citation in the natural science showed that there are only a few differences in motivation between citing oneself and citing others.

Going from self-citation's motivation to the effects of those self-citations, Fowler and Aksmes (2007) mentioned that the more authors cite themselves the more likely they are to be cited by others. On the other hand, after study of 400 economics articles, Medoff (2006) showed that an author's self-citation didn't have statistically significant effects on that article's total number of citations. This study agrees with Bonzi and Snyder (1991) one way or another. Ultimately, Fowler and Aksmes (2007) noted that there are currently no penalties for frequent of self-citing. These results question the use of citations to evaluate performance. Clearly notable was the uncertainty about the effect of the number of citing on success evaluation of an article. This research will explore the real impotent evaluation criteria.

Appendix D. Synthesis Matrices

Synthesis Matrix 1 is a basic matrix that focuses only on listing sources. Matrix 2 is more complex and will help students find connections among their sources.

Synthesis Matrix 1

Topic	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3

Synthesis Matrix 2

Article Info	Type of Research/Purpose	Important Topics	Methodology	Results	Limitations/Further Research