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Conducting a Literature Search

Once you identify your topic and preliminary research question(s), your next step is to explore the literature related to your research question(s). A literature search will help you understand how your study fits into what is already known about this topic and help you refine your research questions. This worksheet will help you systematically explore the literature.

OPTIONAL Part 0: Exploring the SoTL Literature

Identify specific journals you plan on searching during your literature review. You may find this <u>Teaching Journal Directory</u> helpful in getting started!

Discipline-Specific Publications	General SoTL Publications

Pick 1-2 of these journals and review the titles of articles in the most recent issue(s) to identify potentially relevant articles for your SoTL project. Select up to three articles and review the keywords. Use these keywords to help you identify search terms (Part I, next).

Part I. Identifying Keywords

Identify keywords that will help you locate relevant literature.

Broad Keywords	Specific Keywords



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Part II. Identifying Articles

Below, you will find a variety of ways to begin your SoTL literature search. As you start identifying articles, read the titles and abstracts to decide whether they might be relevant to your study.

Database Search

Go to: https://guides.lib.virginia.edu/highered and click on "7 Education Databases (EBSCO)". Use the terms you identified in Part I to search "AB Abstracts" and/or "SU Subject Term." Play around with a combination of terms, search locations, and use of quotations. (Tip: If this type of searching is familiar to you, use the 'advanced search function' to select more search options.)

(Note. If you are not at the University of Virginia, identify your institution's corresponding Library Guides or available databases and work from there.)

AI Search Tools

Specialized AI research tools can help you identify relevant literature for your SoTL project. For a user-friendly entry point, try posing your research question to <u>Consensus</u> or <u>Elicit</u>.

Generative AI Prompt

If you are interested in using generative AI to support your search, consider using the prompt below in your general generative AI tool of choice with access to the Internet (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini). It is particularly well suited to ChatGPT's "Deep Research." Be sure to provide the information requested in the brackets!

You are a researcher with expertise in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), educational research, and academic literature synthesis. I am conducting a literature review for a SoTL project focused on [insert topic].

Please identify, synthesize, and summarize peer-reviewed empirical research related to this topic. I am looking for a scholarly synthesis that is comprehensive and well-organized.

Topic Focus: The emphasis is on [insert desired content]

Educational Context: Only include research relevant to [insert the education settings of interest, including academic level and discipline; be clear if any contexts should be excluded]



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Geographic Scope: Prioritize research conducted in [insert preferred context, e.g., the United States or similar higher education systems]

Research Type: Focus on [insert preferred types, e.g., empirical studies—quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, etc.]

Methodology and Frameworks: Summarize dominant research methods used in this area. Identify commonly applied theoretical/conceptual frameworks (e.g., [insert preferred or likely frameworks]).

Source Requirements: Only include peer-reviewed journal articles. Strictly exclude preprints, white papers, conference proceedings, blogs, or other gray literature. [Adapt these limiters as appropriate.] Prioritize high-quality SoTL and educational journals such as Teaching & Learning Inquiry, The Journal of Higher Education, College Teaching, Studies in Higher Education, Active Learning in Higher Education, International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and discipline-specific journals (e.g., [insert relevant disciplinary journals]). Emphasize research from [insert timeframe, e.g., last 3 years (2022-present)]. I am already aware of work by [insert relevant scholars]. Please check for recent publications (2022-present) by them related to this topic.

Output Instructions: Synthesize and summarize key findings across the literature (no isolated summaries—synthesize by themes, patterns, or gaps). Highlight gaps in the current literature that could guide my study. Suggest a possible organizational structure for the literature review (by theme, method, framework, or chronologically). Provide APA-style citations with DOIs or journal titles for all sources. Do not fabricate any sources or metadata—I will independently verify each citation. You may use a chart or bullet format where helpful to convey complex comparisons.

Please allocate Deep Research resources efficiently by retrieving only the highest-quality, relevant sources. Prioritize clarity, synthesis, and scholarly alignment. Avoid repetition or filler text.