Writing your Literature Review

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http://www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au/learning
http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au
WORKSHOP OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Why do a literature review?
- Finding a research topic
- Recording and evaluating the readings

Tea Break 10.30am

- Developing reasoned arguments
- Deconstructing arguments
- Integrating the material into a review of literature
- Revisiting of Workshop Objectives, Evaluation and Close

WRITING YOUR THESIS OUTLINE

**STEP 1**
Aim for a respectable number of chapters:

1. Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Literature Review
4. Methodology
5. Literature Review
6. Conclusions
7. Conclusions

5 = “That's IT??”
6-7 = “Not bad”
8+ = “Are you crazy??”

**STEP 2**
Fill in the “freebies”:

**THESIS OUTLINE**

1. INTRODUCTION
2. LIT REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
4. (THAT STUFF YOU DID YOUR FIRST YEAR)
5. (STUFF YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING NOW)
6. (MAKE STUFF UP)
7. CONCLUSIONS

(It'll be years before you actually have to work on that later chapter, and by then your thesis topic will have changed anyway)

**STEP 3**
Make up titles for the “meat” chapters:

**STEP 4**
Voilá! You just bought yourself another two years

So, how's your thesis going?

You're half way done!

www.phdcomics.com
OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

- To examine the purposes of writing a literature review
- To identify the elements of a good literature review
- To become familiar with the steps involved in writing a literature review
- To recognise the need for critical thinking when evaluating a body of material.
- To learn to synthesise ideas in the development of a reasoned argument leading to your hypothesis.

One element of thesis writing that is often not given enough attention is the finding, managing and reviewing of literature. Not paying enough attention to these tasks will have significant consequences for your thesis.

Today’s workshop is focused on effective literature searching and writing techniques.

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<tr>
<th>LITERATURE REVIEW: USE AND APPLICATION</th>
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<td>HIGH QUALITY THESIS</td>
<td>MARGINAL QUALITY THESIS</td>
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<td>Expert use of the literature in the design of the</td>
<td>Inadequate coverage or focus of the</td>
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<td>study and discussion of the findings.</td>
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<td>Thorough, clear and incisive reporting of the</td>
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**Brainstorming Question:** What is a review of literature? Besides increasing your knowledge of your research topic, what other skills might it develop?
WHY DO A LITERATURE REVIEW?

While the form of the literature review may vary with different types of studies, the basic purposes remain constant. In general, the literature review should:

1. Provide a context for the research
2. Justify the research
3. Ensure you will not be replicating existing research or reproduce previous errors.
4. Situate your research topic, explain how it builds on, complements or challenges existing research and knowledge.
5. Enable the researcher to learn from previous theory on the subject.
6. Identify gaps, controversies or limitations in previous research (critique previous research).
7. Show that the work is adding to the understanding and knowledge of the field (allowing you to identify the distinctive contribution that your study will make).
8. Help refine, focus or even change the topic.
9. Define a specific research question

There are other benefits arising from conducting a literature review. You build knowledge; while reading you learn about important concepts and research methods in your field. You also learn, incidentally, how research findings are presented and discussed in your particular discipline.

From the outset, you should be aware that searching and reviewing the literature is an ongoing task, one that you should be committed to throughout your project. The literature review itself should not be thought of as a discrete or stand alone segment of your thesis. In many ways, it penetrates the thesis to give it strength and authority. Your literature review is best considered an on-going process that you should be committed to throughout the course of your research. The techniques of searching for, analysing and critiquing relevant literature are used in many stages of your thesis project. Literature searching and evaluation permeates the thesis writing process at many levels.
How should I write a literature review? The following seven steps can be used as a guide when writing your literature review.

1) Survey the literature

2) Begin to formulate a research topic/question

3) Record and organise the literature

4) Make notes on the literature

5) Identify vital sources

6) Subject these to a critical reading

7) Integrate the material into a ‘review of literature’
The term literature search refers to a ‘systematic and thorough search of all types of published literature in order to identify as many items as possible that are relevant to a particular topic’ (Gash, 2000, p.1). The sorts of material you might find will be diverse, perhaps including:

- Books (textbooks, monographs, and treatises),
- Journal articles (including from e-journals),
- Reports
- Papers given at conferences and seminars,
- Theses
- Audio-visual material
- Research papers
- Encyclopaedias
- Handbooks
- Maps
- Newspapers
- Statistics

Begin writing as soon as you begin reading about your topic area. Remember that age of material is important. Generally references should reflect recent information. Start perhaps with the seminal references everyone quotes but also include the most recent or ‘cutting edge’ material.

Despite the diversity and breadth of your initial reading material, you should try to identify literature which speaks to the topic under investigation. In other words don’t waste time on readings which are not directly related to your intended research topic. Make an appointment with your reference librarian to discuss database searches for relevant material.

Searching

- Where to start?
  (Get to know your Reference Librarian. What are the key data bases? What types of sources will you use? Will all your sources be academic journals? If not, where to access other materials? How to search effectively?)

- Be systematic in your search and in recording referencing details: consider date, place, author and location

- Be a good sharer

Ask a Librarian
http://www.library.uwa.edu.au/library_services/ask_a_librarian

Reference librarians can
- answer questions about “using the Library’s collections, resources and services....Responses will usually be issued by the next working day”
- offer training sessions in information literacy (contact your subject library for further details)

**Question:** Have you decided on the criteria you will use to narrow the scope of your literature searches? Consider time frames, keywords, themes etc. Brainstorm some ideas within your group, and then write up your own criteria as they relate directly to your research.

**Question:** What methods will you use to locate references in your field? (e.g. Google Scholar.....)

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2). Finding a research topic? At this stage - the initial or background reading period - there is little critical analysis. You will survey the area historically and thematically using key word searches. If you are only beginning to become conversant with the context of the chosen field of study and with the vocabulary and methodologies used, then the scope of your survey will necessarily be broad. Soon, you will begin to negotiate the parameters of the research so that they are narrower. If your PhD research is somehow an extension of the sort of study you were perhaps doing at the Honours of Masters level, then you have a distinct advantage.

It is important that you work effectively toward narrowing the scope of your search quickly. Constructing a viable thesis argument demands this. (Journal articles will increasingly become more important as your focus intensifies. They are useful
because they often include recommendations or suggestions for further work and represent current thinking in the area of interest. The same applies to your supervisor; they can assist you greatly identifying potential research topics). It is only as you refine your topic that the feasibility of your study will become evident.

Here, it is vitally important to keep clear and accurate records of what you are reading. This not only includes the complete bibliographic reference, the source where the reference was found, its location and availability, an annotation or abstract, but also an evaluation of the material.

3) Recording and organising the literature

You will need an organised system to keep track of your references. Methods include:

1. Endnote or another computerised referencing program.
2. A computer application such as an electronic spreadsheet or database program.
3. A paper based file of bibliographic information.

When you find an article, put the publication details straight into your referencing system.

The advantages of keeping a record of the literature you are reading:

- It will allow you to show your supervisor exactly what you have read
- It will ensure that your bibliography is complete, that is, in the final stages of your project you are less likely to be hunting for bibliographic details of sources cited two or three years previous.
Examples of a card system
This is good for a smaller number of sources. Endnote is good for a larger number of sources.

**Palumbo-Liu, David & Ulrich Gumbrecht, Hans (eds)**

1997

*Streams of Cultural Capital (esp. chapter 2, Consumption, Duration, History)*

*Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.*

*Reid Library*

Hssmn 303.482 1997 STR

7 day loan

Chapter two examines questions arising from the transpositions and recontextualizations of cultural objects across and between national borders. It questions how cultural hegemony is refused, diffused, dissiminated, appropriated and practiced. The author argues that transnational movements of cultural objects challenge the notions of a simply produced and absorbed universal culture that is understood solely as an amplified, single-nation model.
EndNote is a software tool that allows you to:

- Create a database of your references and helps you organise them
- Use the references in a Word document
- Automatically formats your in text citations and creates a bibliography in your chosen Reference style

Who can use EndNote?

EndNote is available on all UWA machines. UWA staff and students can download the program onto their personal machines for free.

Useful feature:

![Grouping references]

Things to consider when thinking about storage of your sources

1. You are building your own library!
2. Start your thesis bibliography NOW!
3. Record reference details
4. Keep track of your evaluation notes for each article, chapter etc
5. Record the vitals but also record your COMMENTS including critical responses to this article
6. Store hardcopies of journal articles and so forth so that they can be easily retrieved.
7. Schedule time for this task!
Starting out:
In some disciplines it can be difficult at first just to read an article and make sense of it. Some of the terms and concepts in especially theoretical works may be unfamiliar and difficult to penetrate. Here are some tips for starting out and in particular for reading difficult material.

1. Start with what is written about your topic in more ‘popular’ or accessible journals.
2. Build up a glossary of unfamiliar terms and definitions used in discussions of your topic.
3. Establish a context for the information you will read. Perhaps read the abstract, introduction and conclusion of an article first – perhaps even examine the sub-headings.

**Exercise:** Outline a literature management system you can or will use to manage your references. Consider what strategies you will use too and discuss this with your peers. Use their feedback to refine your own system.

4). Making notes on the literature

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2. Build up a glossary of unfamiliar terms and definitions used in discussions of your topic.
3. Establish a context for the information you will read. Perhaps read the abstract, introduction and conclusion of an article first – perhaps even examine the sub-headings.
4. Skim read the main sections of the article to establish a sense of its scope, purpose and themes.

Then attempt a deeper reading if you think the reference is important:

It is highly recommended that you make more extensive notes on the material as you read it. You can use a checklist as a more systematic means for recording information about what it is you are reading. For instance, you might think about and record the following, but you might tailor your own criteria as you see fit:

- Has the author formulated a problem, what is it?
- Is the problem clearly defined, is its significance clearly established?
- What methodologies has the researcher employed?
- What is the author’s theoretical framework?
- Has the author evaluated the literature relevant to the problem/issue?
- How does the author structure the argument?
- In what way does the research contribute to an understanding of the problem under study?
- How does this book or article relate to the specific thesis question I am developing?

Intrinsic to these questions is the notion that you should begin to think critically about the literature in front of you, that is, you are evaluating it rather than simply reviewing it.

Create an annotated bibliography:

(See handout)
At this point you have identified a body of current, highly relevant literature that you have used to refine your thesis question. By subjecting the material to the above evaluation process you can discard what is not relevant. There is no reason now for you to delay the writing of your literature review proper. It should be designed to show the ‘weaknesses’ of past studies, and what has to be done to move forward in the field. This means that you will be subjecting the material you are reading to a further process of critical thinking.

The need to evaluate what you are reading has already been emphasised. This is very much part of the ‘narrowing process’. However, when you have selected the key works that you want to include in your literature review, it is time to subject the ideas put forward in the material to sceptical inquiry. We do this in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

**Structuring your Review:**

To ensure your literature review is a coherent piece of work you need a plan and an overall structure. Some of this planning work can happen as you read, but you may also need to do a brainstorming session to work out a plan for the review as a whole. The sections must be presented in an order that makes sense and with clear divisions in the sets of ideas to be discussed. There are different ways to organise information in a literature review, for example:

- Chronologically
- By theoretical perspective
- In order of importance
- By methodological type
- By using any structure that is logical and fits the content

A common error in literature reviews is for writer to present material from one author, followed by information from another. For instance Brown (1995) found this, Smith (1997) found that, Jones (2000) found the other and Green, Sanders and Jackson (1999) found something else. This reads more as a list than a discussion of the similarities, differences, strengths, weaknesses etc.

CONSIDER AND INCORPORATE AT ALL TIMES YOUR VOICE AND YOUR (INTENDED) RESEARCH.
Does the literature fall into discernable categories for the purposes of this thesis?

If so what are they?

What is the rationale for the choice of categories?

In each of the categories, what is the literature telling us about:
- What we know
- What we think we know
- What we don’t know

Does the distribution of literature say anything about the nature of the gaps in, and content of, our understanding?

Do these gaps point to a set of research questions?

Is there a single research question that summarises these questions?
Constructing an Argument

Where possible, you should present some sort of argumentation (or line of argument). That means taking all those critical comments you have made in your notes and using them to express an academic opinion. This will make it easier for you to connect each section in your review and improve the overall coherence of the document.

The outline statement in the introduction makes the argument clear and presents the ordering of the material clear.

It is written in academic prose that is clear, concise, unambiguous, objective and accurate. It should not be pompous, wordy, dense and (therefore) difficult to read.

ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE OF OUR SAMPLE LITERATURE REVIEW

Notes:
WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF CRITICAL THINKING?

When you think critically you do not accept information at face value.

**Question:** We all think critically in many everyday situations – in other words there are instances when we consciously suspend belief and put a greater emphasis on evaluating the truth and accuracy of the information that is being presented to us. Can anyone suggest some examples of when these situations might arise?

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6). Adopting a critical reading approach

**Evaluating arguments:**

- What is the stated research problem?
- What are the stated research aims? Are they likely to lead to some resolution of the research problem?
- Is appropriate methodology chosen and is it properly applied?
- What is your evaluation of the interpretation of the data presented by the author of the paper?
- Are you convinced by the argument/s presented? On what basis?
- What do other papers on this research topic say? Is there a difference of opinion? Are there differences in data obtained? Are there differences in interpretation? What might account for these differences?
- What observations, data, research, logic or theoretical framework are arguments in the literature based on?
What assumptions underlie the theoretical framework employed in different papers?

Do the assumptions always hold? Under what circumstances might they be flawed?

What assumptions underlie the methods used to collect evidence? Are these assumptions reasonable? Under what circumstances might they be flawed?

What’s new/what’s especially valuable about what is contained in this article ie what is its contribution?

How well does the book or article fulfil the promises set out in the title, abstract/preface and introduction?

How effective is the methodology?

How effectively is the argument made? How persuasive is the evidence?

For its audience, what are the article’s strengths? What are its weaknesses?

**DECONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT**

Argumentation really is the vehicle of intellectual enquiry. Scholars will not just state what they think, but give some reasons or evidence to support their contentions. So, one argument model might look like this:

Premise  
Evidence  
Evidence  
Evidence  
So/therefore [indicator word]  
Conclusion

A simple example:

“There are three factors which show that free enterprise ideal does not fit our economic system at this time. First of all, unionisation protects labour from vulnerability to market conditions. Secondly, government supports and regulates industry. Thirdly, protective tariffs work selectively to isolate some domestic products from foreign competition”.

In writing a review of the literature, you are obliged to situate your research question or hypothesis in the context of previous work. You must do this in such a way as to explain and justify the decisions you are making. What is required to accomplish this is a step-by-step explanation of your decisions, punctuated by references to studies that support your ongoing argument.

### Step one:
The review of literature is not the place to display everything you have read on the subject to date. You must be selective and only include studies that are critically relevant to your research. However, in the first instance it is helpful to set forth the broad pattern of knowledge as it exists in the area in order to appeal for the reader’s acceptance of the logic you are about to present. So, pose here your research question, then the specific hypothesis through which the question will be answered.

### Step two:
Organize the literature review into sections that present themes or identify trends, including relevant theory. You are not trying to list all the material published, but to synthesize and evaluate it according to the guiding concept of your thesis or research question. Here is where you can really show the reader that you have evaluated the quality of the information.

### Step three:
Identify the line of argumentation you want to pursue. Now you need to marshal evidence for your thesis from the material that you have selected and grouped thematically. Without referring to the specific details in the articles, summarise in one or two paragraphs the combined findings of each cluster of studies. As you present your argument, identify gaps in the research that your study will fill. Also show how your study will extend the knowledge that has already been established.

### Step four:
Write a conclusion that summarises and reiterates your argument.

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In the **INTRODUCTION**, you should:

- Define or identify the general topic, issue, or area of concern, thus providing an appropriate context for reviewing the literature.
- Point out overall trends in what has been published about the topic; or conflicts in theory, methodology, evidence, and conclusions; or gaps in research and scholarship; or a single problem or new perspective of immediate interest.
• Establish the writer’s reason (point of view) for reviewing the literature; explain the criteria to be used in analysing and comparing literature and the organization of the review (sequence); and, when necessary, state why certain literature is or is not included (scope).

In the **BODY**, you should:

• Group research studies and other types of literature (reviews, theoretical articles, case studies, etc.) according to common denominators such as qualitative versus quantitative approaches, conclusions of authors, specific purpose or objective, chronology, etc.
• Summarize individual studies or articles with as much or as little detail as each merits according to its comparative importance in the literature, remembering that space (length) denotes significance.
• Provide the reader with strong "umbrella" sentences at beginnings of paragraphs, "signposts" throughout, and brief "so what" summary sentences at intermediate points in the review to aid in understanding comparisons and analyses.

In the **CONCLUSION** you should:

• Summarize major contributions of significant studies and articles to the body of knowledge under review, maintaining the focus established in the introduction.
• Evaluate the current "state of the art" for the body of knowledge reviewed, pointing out major methodological flaws or gaps in research, inconsistencies in theory and findings, and areas or issues pertinent to future study.

Conclude by providing some insight into the relationship between the central topic of the literature review and a larger area of study such as a discipline, a scientific endeavor, or a profession.
Other Useful Resources:

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<th>Websites: <a href="http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html">http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html</a></th>
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