

Literature Reviews: Staying on Track

Once you have established the focus of your literature review, and have started to locate literature around the topic, you need to manage what you find and, finally, put it all together. This information sheet provides some strategies for these stages.

Step 3: Managing what you find

Evaluating and discussing the literature

In a literature review, you are not simply recounting what each author says about a topic. You need to critically evaluate and discuss the literature, and convince the reader of its relevance to your own work.

To do this, you need to question each item you read, to assess its:

- **Reliability** – are the facts accurate?
- **Credibility** – is the author an authority?
- **Perspective** – identify bias or opinion
- **Purpose** – does the information inform, explain or persuade?
- **Evidence** – does the author use facts, examples, statistics, expert testimony?

Sorting and classifying the literature

There are many ways to sort and classify the literature that you are reading. Regardless of which method you choose, you need to maintain some organisation so that your final literature review will benefit. This will also help you to maintain focus on your research question(s).

As you collect and evaluate information, remember to record referencing/citation details, including page numbers for ideas that you wish to refer to.

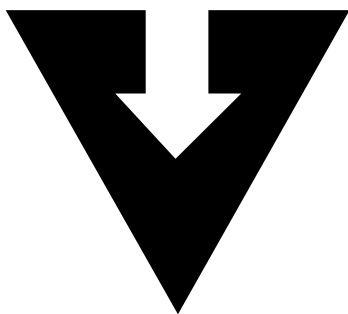
Literature can then be classified by:

- Your thesis chapters (if applicable).
- By your own categories.
- By theoretical perspective (e.g. 'Marxist', 'Behaviourist', 'Post-modernist').
- By categories in your discipline.
- By whether they support, or conflict with, your thesis or central argument.
- According to reliability.

Step 4: Putting it all together

By revisiting some of the main aims of literature reviews, you can begin to address some or all of these questions for yourself:

- **Justification:** Why is this research problem, question or project important?
- **Rationale:** How does previous research relate to these research question(s)? Who are the key authors?
- **Contribution:** How will my research benefit stakeholders in the field? What will we learn that we didn't already know? What problem might be solved, or issue resolved?
- **Argument:** What am I trying to convince the reader of? Is there a gap in the literature?



Remember the 'inverted triangle' or 'funnel' approach: Proceed from the general, wider view of research to your specific research problem or question. You can then demonstrate that your research problem/question 'grows' from the discussion of the literature, which sets up a 'stage' for your work.

A suggested structure

You might like to approach the literature review in the following way (keeping in mind that, depending on your aims and objectives, the structure may need to be slightly different):

Introduction – including your topic, aim, main ideas, overall plan, limits, and scope.

Body – including your research (where applicable); discussion of evidence, theories, concepts, and relationships between different literature.

Conclusion – where you bring together the key issues, trends, common threads, major gaps, and/or agreements and disagreements in the literature.

Finally, **stay on track** by continuing to ask yourself:

- What does this literature review aim to do?
- Have I communicated this to the reader?
- Have I accomplished the aims that I set out for the reader?

Read the other Information Sheet on 'Literature Reviews: Getting Started' to identify strategies for beginning your literature review.

Further Reading

- Craswell, G. (2005). *Writing for Academic Success – A Postgraduate Guide*. London: Sage Publications.
- Murray, R. (2002). *How to write a thesis*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Turner, K., Ireland, L., Krenus, B., & Pointon, L. (2008). *Essential Academic Skills*. Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Wisker, G. (2001). *The postgraduate research handbook: succeed with your MA, MPhil, EdD and PhD*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

External Links

- UNSW: The Learning Centre Academic Skills Resources
<http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/litrev.html> ;
<http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/pdf/Litrev.pdf>
- The University of Melbourne: http://unimelb.libguides.com/lit_reviews

Additional learning tools / Sources of information

- See www.griffith.edu.au/library/workshops-training/self-help-resources for further resources to complement this information sheet.

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