

Literature Review

Broadly, the purpose of a review is to guide one's own research and specifically, a literature review should include:

- Understanding the key concepts, terminologies, ideas, theories and practices in the field
- Becoming familiar with the main issues/problems/theories
- Becoming familiar with the key researchers in the field
- Establishing the state of knowledge in the field
- Establishing the state of the art in technology development
- Identifying and evaluating relevant research methods
- Avoiding duplication
- Finding 'gaps' in the field, or creating a research space
- Establishing the significance of your research
- Showing how your work builds on previous work
- Showing how your work can be differentiated from previous work
- Refining your research question/s
- Keeping up with current developments in the field

The literature review goes through various stages – the “first phase” literature review you are asked to produce at the beginning by your supervisors will be used to demonstrate your familiarity with the field. However, your literature review should grow and change as your research progresses, and should be revised at different stages in the course of your studies to include the idea that it is a REVIEW and forms an important part of your research argument.

As a research student, you are going to be creating new knowledge in the field, and the final literature review that is included in your thesis or dissertation needs to persuade the reader that this new knowledge is relevant, significant and a logical development from current work in the field.

There will therefore be an argument implied in the way you review the literature. This argument relates to the value of your research and to the methods you use to carry it out. It may also relate to the ways in which you have framed the work theoretically. You will therefore need to engage in critical analysis and evaluation of existing work.

It is important to keep the reader focused on the rationale and significance of your work, and on the key issues involved. It is therefore important to write with the correct focus and emphasis.

Structure

The literature review has its own internal structure.

Introduction

The literature review starts with an introduction or series of introductory paragraphs which provides for the reader the content being covered, the structure or how the review is organised, and the delimitation (or boundaries) of the subject matter to be covered (mentions what is outside the scope of the study).

Body

The literature review has a body consisting of series of sections and sub-sections which discuss the literature in a logical and coherent way.

Each section discusses and evaluates the literature in terms of the most important topics or key concepts relevant to the area of study in which you are working.

Each section ends with a summary and sentences which relate this to the focus of the research area.

Conclusions

The literature review uses the most salient points from each of the final section summaries to suggest the need for the area of research or research question you are asking.

It then concludes with a paragraph that relates the literature to the research project design (methodology).

The structure of a literature review can be summarised as follows:

The literature review should begin with an introduction to the topic, and should demonstrate a logical progression of ideas in terms of its structure, the links between sections, and the conclusions reached. You should conclude with an indication of how your research will address the issues raised in the review of existing research.

The literature review should focus very clearly on existing research that has been done on the research area. It should bring together and demonstrate the skills of summarising, paraphrasing, synthesis, critical analysis, citation and in-text referencing, a reference list, appropriate writing structure, and evidence of the writer's proofreading and editing before submission.

Adapted from: Dovey, T 2009, *The literature review*, ELSSA Centre, UTS & Royce, T 2009, *The structure of the literature review*, ELSSA Centre, UTS.