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Writing a Literature Review

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Learning Objectives

- To understand the purpose, necessary requirements and elements for writing a literature review
- To ensure “voice” is clearly expressed through the use of certain linguistic structures

What is 'Literature'?

Literature covers everything relevant that is written on a topic:

- books
- journal articles
- newspaper articles
- historical records
- government reports
- theses and dissertations, etc.

What is a Literature Review?

A literature review is a critical assessment of the relevant literature to a particular topic in relation to the research being proposed.

<http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills/writing/literature>

** Sometimes it can stand alone – you might be asked to write an assignment that is *only* a literature review.

What is a Literature Review?

Essays → literature supports argument

Literature review → literature is the subject

Logical structure → paragraphs: introduction, body conclusion

Purpose → to present:

- **theory**
- **methodology**
- **What is missing** (*if part of a research project*)

In essays you use relevant literature to support your argument and ideas. In a literature review, the literature itself is the subject of discussion. It has an introduction, body and conclusion, well-formed paragraphs, and a logical structure.

Presents the **theory** of the research

Presents the research **methodology**

Outlines **what is missing** the gap that your research intends to fill (*if part of a research project*)

Purpose

- Build knowledge
- Demonstrate scholarly ability
- Evaluate and synthesise information

If the literature review is part of your own research:

- Identify the 'gap' in the research
- Produce a rationale

Improve your understanding and build knowledge.

Demonstrate your scholarly ability to identify relevant information and to outline your knowledge of the issue(s).

Evaluate and synthesise what past researchers have said.

If the literature review is part of your own research:

Identify the 'gap' in the research that your study will address, giving a context for your research.

Produce a rationale or justification for your study.

Getting Started

If the literature review is part of your own research:

- literature review → research question
- Research question → narrow scope of reading

Always keep in mind that the literature review needs to relate to and explain your research question.

Once you have your question you will be able to refine and narrow down the scope of your reading

The Literature Search

Find relevant titles

Sources:

- Bibliographies and references in key textbooks and recent journal articles.
- Your supervisor or tutor should tell you which are the key texts and relevant journals.
- Abstracting databases, such as Proquest, Sage etc.

Find out what has been written on your subject. Use as many bibliographical sources as you can to find relevant titles.

The following are likely sources:

Bibliographies and references in key textbooks and recent journal articles. Your supervisor or tutor should tell you which are the key texts and relevant journals. Abstracting databases, such as Proquest, Sage etc.

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The Literature Search

Use the library search function:

Online Tutorials

<http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/research/finding-and-managing-information>

Reading

Read with purpose

Step 1 – Scan and skim → is it relevant?

Step 2 - If relevant, read thoroughly

Reading with and for a purpose helps you to quickly locate, evaluate and read relevant research.

Step 1 - Look at the Table of Contents, the Abstract, headings and sub-headings, to see if the text is relevant. Learn to use efficient scanning and skimming reading techniques.

Step 2 - If relevant, read it thoroughly to find specific research to support your review.

Probe Further

- What are the author's credentials?
 - area of expertise; number of citations; institutional connections
- When was the text published? How recent is it? When was the website updated?
- How much of the content is fact and how much opinion? Is the language objective or emotive?
- Is the argument supported by evidence? What kind of evidence? How is the argument developed?
- Do you agree with the opinions stated?

Useful Questions

- What definitions does it use?
- What is its general methodological approach? What methods are used?
- What type of study is it? Is it an empirical report, a theoretical study, a sociological or political account, historical overview, etc?
- What is the author's stated or implied purpose?
- What conclusions has the author made?
- What points/ kinds of data back up the conclusions
- Does it follow a particular school of thought?
- Is it related to other researchers' school of thought?

Your Voice

Your 'voice' must be identifiable

Don't mix tones and arguments of other writers

Your theoretical position and your critical evaluations must be clear

Your own attitude or someone else's? – language must be clear

Your 'voice', - your perspective, position or standpoint, should be clearly identifiable in the literature review

Because you are writing about other people's work it is easy for your own 'voice' to be lost and reads like a mixture of different tones and arguments.

Your theoretical position should be clearly and strongly stated and your critical evaluations are an integral part of this.

It is important that your language indicates your own or other writers' attitudes to the question or issues

Think Critically

- **Presenting** a point of view in a structured, clear & rational way
- **Reflecting** on issues in a methodical way, using logic & insight
- **Drawing conclusions** about arguments based on evidence
- **Identifying assertions** & claims of others
- **Evaluating evidence** from alternative points of view
- **Weighing up arguments & evidence** in a balanced way
- **Recognising false logic** & other persuasive devices
- Reading between the lines – **understanding subtext**

Points to Remember

Literature reviews :

- integrate the research of **various authors**
- show **similarities and differences** of ideas
- show **wide reading**
- show analysis and **critical evaluation** of what the student has read

Organising, Analysing and Planning your Summaries

Review notes:

- what authors agree and disagree?
- cluster similar research together, e.g. what information is similar or different.
- what major questions remain unanswered?
- what are the possible directions for future research?

To organise your research, you can draw a mind map and organise the research into major points.

Your Thoughts

Summarise notes

Write bibliographical details

Write down your own thoughts about the readings → **your own academic voice.**

Summarise your notes for each reading.

Remember to write down the full bibliographical details. This will save you an enormous amount of time later on.

It is also useful to write down your own thoughts about the readings. These are useful when you revisit the notes and / or use them in your writings to create **your own academic voice.**

Example Notes

Organising notes from different sources

Topic: English is the global world language

Look at kind of lang used in social media

check stats!

Text 1 – (Bond 2002)	Text 2 – (Robertson 2003)	Text 3 (Havir 1999)	Text 4 (Kerstjens 2000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International language for business used for international forums (eg UN) second language in many countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> used in worldwide technology computers key factor in spread of English internationalisation of education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> small number of speakers worldwide importance of English linked to US power ie 'political' more people speak Chinese worldwide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> minority of speakers in world Chinese dominant especially in future English will decline in future

get stats!

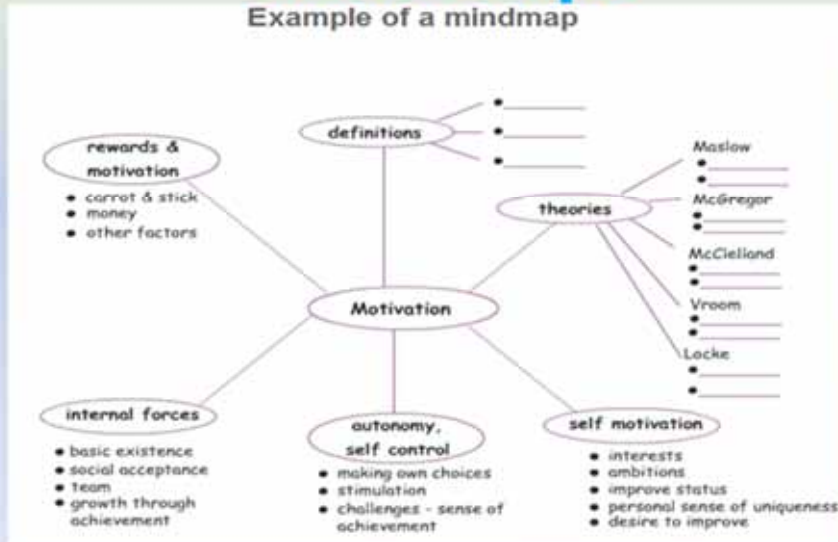
Chinese may be dominant first BUT not 2nd lang

Evidence for decline??

https://www.disweb.rmit.edu/au/lsu/content/4_WritingSkills/writing_tuts/sythesising_LL/index.html

Mind Maps

Example of a mindmap



Source: https://www.dlsweb.mit.edu.au/tsu/content/2_assessmenttasks/assess_tuts/lit_review_LL/example1.html

Writing the Introduction

Introduction should include:

- the topic
- the parameters
- the basis for your selection of the literature
- what you are going to cover

If the literature review is part of your own research:

- the scope of your research
- how the review ties in with your own research topic

Introduction should include:

- the nature of the topic under discussion (the topic of your thesis)
- the parameters of the topic (what does it include and exclude?)
- the basis for your selection of the literature
- what you are going to cover in the review

If the literature review is part of your own research:

It must tell the reader the following:

- the scope of your research
- how the review ties in with your own research topic

Writing the Introduction

Topic sentence - identifies five major themes as the scope of this review

Many theories have been proposed to explain what motivates human behaviour. Although the literature covers a wide variety of such theories, this review will focus on five major themes which emerge repeatedly throughout the literature reviewed. These themes are: incorporation of the self-concept into traditional theories of motivation, the influence of rewards on motivation, the increasing importance of internal forces of motivation, autonomy and self-control as sources of motivation, and narcissism as an essential component of motivation. Although the literature presents these themes in a variety of contexts, this paper will primarily focus on their application to self-motivation.

5 major themes to be covered

Concluding sentence - specific focus

Source: <https://emedia.mit.edu.au/learninglab/content/literature-review-overview>

The Body

Synthesise many texts in one paragraph

Each paragraph (or section) → different aspect of the literature
→ classify and evaluate themes

A literature review **synthesises** many texts in one paragraph.

Each paragraph (or section if it is a long thesis) of the literature review should classify and evaluate the themes of the texts that are relevant to your thesis; each paragraph or section of your review should deal with a different aspect of the literature.

Structure

- A literature review requires you *integrate* research from different sources. You should not simply devote one separate paragraph to each source.
- If you are unsure how to structure it, you should check with your tutor/ supervisor.
- There are many possible ways to structure your literature review...

Structure

- **Topical or thematic organisation**

Divided into sections based on categories or conceptual subjects

- **Chronological organisation**

Ordered according to an historical or developmental context.

- **The 'Classic' studies organisation**

Outline of the major significant writings (including benchmarks)

- **Inverted pyramid organisation**

Begins with a broad perspective then more and more specific/ localised studies

Topical or thematic organisation

The research is divided into sections representing the categories or conceptual subjects for your topic. The discussion is organised into these categories or subjects.

Chronological organisation

The discussion of the research/articles is ordered according to an historical or developmental context.

The 'Classic' studies organisation

A discussion or outline of the major writings regarded as significant in your area of study. (Remember that in nearly all research there are 'benchmark' studies or articles that should be acknowledged).

Inverted pyramid organisation

The literature review begins with a discussion of the related literature from a broad perspective. It then deals with more and more specific or localised studies which focus increasingly on the specific question at hand.

Paragraphs

- a main statement / idea that you are putting forward, ie topic sentence
- definitions in use;
- evidence from current/ previous research studies to support / argue your idea, showing where the writers agree and / or disagree
- current discoveries about the topic;
- principal questions that are being asked;
- current mainstream versus alternative differing theoretical assumptions, differing political outlooks, and other conflicts
- general conclusions that are being drawn;
- summing up and linking to the next idea (paragraph).

Verbs for Referencing

To incorporate quotations / references into a literature review, you can use a variety of verbs.

Verbs also allow the writer to indicate the degree to which they support the author of the research, e.g. “claims that” versus “argues that”.

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Example: paragraph structure

<https://emedia.mit.edu.au/learninglab/content/literature-review-overview>

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Example: student analysis

<https://emedia.mit.edu.au/learninglab/content/literature-review-overview>

Conclusion

- A summary of major agreements and disagreements in the literature
- A summary of general conclusions that are being drawn
- **If the literature review is part of your own research:**
- A summary of where your thesis sits in the literature

If the literature review is part of your own research:

A summary of where your thesis sits in the literature

(Remember! Your thesis could become one of the future texts on the subject - how will later research students describe your thesis in their literature reviews?)

In summary

- Identify your research question (if you are carrying out a research project)
- Identify and locate appropriate information
- Read and critically evaluate the information that you locate
- File and store your readings and notes
- Plan, organise and write critically about the literature that you have located
- Use paragraphs - introduction, body and conclusion

Always Remember

- ***Critically*** examine the literature
- Make your “voice” clear

References

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- https://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu/content/2_assessmenttasks/assess_tuts/lit_review_LL/conclusion.html

Activities

<https://emedia.mit.edu.au/learninglab/content/literature-review-overview>

Discover these!

- Online self-help learning resources
- Drop-in & 1:1 consultations
- Writing support sessions
- Conversations@UTS
- Intensive academic English programmes
- Daily workshops
- Volunteer programmes

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