The Literature Review:
Staff Workshop
Offering Guidance to Students

Sophia Butt
Business Management English (BME) Presessional Programme Director
English for International Students Unit (EISU)
University of Birmingham, UK

The purpose of the Literature Review is to…

- define and describe key concepts within a chosen field

- specify the focus, scope and boundaries of research

- identify theories that can help explain important phenomenon for a given topic

- justify propositions or research questions

- highlight research designs and methodology

- draw attention to competing theories or assumptions

- develop a conceptual model to reflect aim of own research

- obtain (often through synthesis) a new perspective on research problems

- highlight gaps in knowledge, thus identify opportunities for future research

The purpose of the Literature Review is to…

In an article by McKercher et al. (2007) it was reported that 50.9% of articles are rejected for poor quality literature reviews. The top ten reasons for rejection are…

McKercher, B., Law, R., Weber, K., Song, H. & Hsu, C. 'Why Referees Reject Manuscripts.' Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 31 (4) November 2007: 455-470.

1. Failure to place the study in a broad(er) context
2. Failure to establish a theoretical framework, where needed
3. Use of old and/or outdated sources
4. No critical evaluation of the literature
5. Literature Review not relevant to the study
6. Poor referencing
7. Did not cite key sources in the review
8. Too short/too long
9. Repetitive
10. Reference stacking (too many references for too few points being made)

Critical Reading for Writing

Students should ask themselves the following questions when reviewing texts for their academic papers…

- Which aspects of my topic does this source address?

- How does this paper define my topic?

- What issues or debates are raised?

- Are there any limitations in the paper/design/arguments?

- Is this a key source for my assignment? Why?

- What concepts, models, perspectives, theories are presented?

- What questions and problems does the paper address that are of relevance to my assignment?

- In what ways does this paper relate to other papers in this field?

- How has the paper helped to develop my understanding of the topic as a whole?

- *If most of the questions are poorly answered – move on…*

3 Types of Literature Review

- Traditional

- Systematic

- Conceptual/theoretical

1: The Traditional Review

- Focuses on a number of key, primary papers into which secondary studies are integrated

- Provides a summary of a particular concept, theory or issue

- Explores prior research findings and the development of theory

- Identifies themes, gaps, issues in the literature

- Used to develop research questions and identify areas for further research

- Often used by MBA and doctoral students

2: The Systematic Review

- *"A systematic review is a review in which there is a comprehensive search for relevant studies on a specific topic, and those identified are then appraised and synthesised according to a pre-determined explicit method"* (Klassen, Jadad & Moher, 1998)

- Originally developed in the field of medicine but has now moved into the business and management field

- Documents all procedures (the research audit trail of databases and search terms used is also noted)

3: The Conceptual/Theoretical Review

- Offer critiques of existing knowledge

- May bring theory from other disciplines to a problem

- Reconceptualises concepts

- May take a particular political or theoretical position and apply the same to the thesis problem/topic

Structuring the Review

Students should choose a structure that best reflects their aim…

- Dialectical approach – different views and theoretical debates are compared and contrasted (suitable where there is divergence)

- Thematic approach – a number of themes are developed, typically based around set research questions

- Narrowing approach – starts with a historical context and/or broad concepts, then narrows down to particular aspects

- Explanatory theories – evaluates a number of different perspectives which have been used in the literature

- Methodological approach – is based on the methods of the researcher, i.e. qualitative and quantitative approaches

Making Claims in the Literature Review
Hart, C. (2001) Doing a Literature Review

- Students should express their voice through claims

- Claim: the declaration or assertion in an argument

- Simply stating a claim does not automatically render it acceptable

- Hart (2001) classifies claims into five types:

  - Claims of Fact

  - Claims of Worth

  - Claims of Policy

  - Claims of Concept, and

  - Claims of Interpretation

- *How would you define each of these terms?*

Claims of Fact

- Statements of proposed truth

- Commonplace in literature reviews

- Require justification by evidence of the truth

- Examples:

  - The Aston Business School has been ranked as 8th in the UK *by Times Higher Education (2010)*.

  - *In a recent study at Oxford University (2011), psycholinguists proved that* being multilingual generates a greater capacity for superior cognition and articulation.

Claims of Worth

- Propose judgments on the merit of an idea

- Can be used to explore the value of courses of action or behaviour

- Are usually associated with *shared agreements* as proof of claim validity

- Example:

  - *Standardised national testing* is preferred to coursework results in determining student knowledge of a subject area.

Claims of Policy

- Statements which set *criteria* or standards

- Directly express what one ought to do

- Demand substantial evidence to prove that the policy will secure the desired results

- Example:

    - A *three strikes and you're out* policy that penalises students who absent themselves from classes should be introduced across the higher education sector in an attempt to combat poor attendance. This policy is commonplace in Scandanavia where absenteeism is rare.

Claims of Concept

- Define a proposition or idea

- Tend to involve *definitions* which are justified by *expert testimony*

- Example:

  - Groupthink is a blind adherence to the force of will exherted by key members of the group, discounting any opportunities for consideration of dissenting opinion *(Machi & McEvoy, 2009:67).*

Claims of Interpretation

- Include expert testimony, empirical research &/or statistical studies

- Commonly *used to build models*, synthesise data & order factual claims

- Example:

  - In his theory of the *Hierarchy of Needs*, Maslow (1943) stated that before a certain level of self-actualisation can be reached, the basic needs of the individual must be fulfilled.

Data vs. Evidence
(Adapted from Machi & McEvoy, 2009:71)

- When supporting a claim in their literature review, students must be mindful of the fact that data and evidence are not the same…

- Data: pieces of information

- Information: value-free

- Evidence: data is collected for a purpose, *often with an agenda*, as evidence forms the basis of proof when making a claim

- Data Quality: refers to the strength & credibility of the data as evidence

Qualifying the Claim

- Evidence for a claim is rarely one-sided

- Students ought to ensure all (or at least two…) sides of the argument are presented when making a strong claim

- Hedging language is recommended, where relevant

- When highlighting data/a claim that refutes own position, consider how this can be negated… e.g.:

  - The UoB presessional questionnaire which was administered to multidisciplinary students showed that 81% of postgraduates rated the programme as 'excellent'. Yet, when the University administered an identical questionnaire to discipline-specific students under the same conditions, there was a noticeable difference in the results with only 74% rating it in the highest category. What must be noted, however, is that the ratio of students on each programme is 1:2.

Critiquing the Literature

Ridley, D. (2008:119) The Literature Review: A Step-by-Step Guide for Students

- Students must be selective about the literature they use: a summary will suffice for some sources; others should be synthesised; some warrant a critique

- When critiquing the literature, they could consider…

  - Comparing and contrasting different theories & concepts before indicating their position

  - Using strategic & selective referencing to support the arguments that underpin their research/position

  - Synthesising & reformulating arguments from two or more sources to create a new or more developed point of view

  - Agreeing with, confirming or refuting a point of view after due consideration of the merits/limitations of the claim

  - Rejecting a point of view by presenting strong reasons for the same

Foregrounding the Voice of the Writer

Ridley, D. (2008:131) The Literature Review: A Step-by-Step Guide for Students

- Students can assert their voice in texts using a number of techniques, the most common being:

  - carefully considering text organisation

  - employing personal pronouns (in moderation)

  - choosing specific citational patterns

  - incorporating evaluative reporting verbs in citations

  - using evaluative adjectives, adverbs & phrases

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Thank you for your attention.

Sophia Butt
Business Management English (BME) Presessional Programme Director

Language Center
Masaryk University

Komenského nám. 2, 601 77 Brno
phone: +420 549 496 447
e-mail: cjv@rect.muni.cz
web: http://lingua.muni.cz