



Academic Writing

The Literature Review

Student Workshop

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evropský
sociální
fond v ČR



EVROPSKÁ UNIE



MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání
pro konkurenceschopnost



INVESTICE
DO ROZVOJE
VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Workshop Aims

By the end of this workshop, you should be able to...

- Understand the rationale behind literature reviews
- Critically appraise information sources
- Realise the importance of synthesis with minimal description
- Critique texts using a variety of linguistic techniques
- Identify the characteristic features of this genre of writing

Why conduct a Literature Review?

[Adapted from White, B. (2004) Thesis Skills. UK: Thomson. Davis, P. (2002) 'Literature Review from Reviewing Literature'. Teaching and Learning Forum 2002. Curtin University of Technology]

- To source existing information
- To identify other researchers interested in topic
- To conceptualise and synthesise grounded theory and empirical data on topic area
- To ensure dissertation is not an unnecessary replication of existing work (a duplicated topic focus may be acceptable – provided it contains a change to the methodology or theory, &/or it challenges previously doubtful results)
- To confirm basic ideas about subject & identify redundant concepts/gaps in existing knowledge
- To determine suitability/testability of a hypothesis
- To inform research design and methodological approach & to provide a focus for the research
- To provide evidence of background reading
- To enable inclusion of suitable citations in assignments

Why conduct a Literature Review?

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- Skills required:
 - Efficient data search techniques
 - Effective reading strategies
 - Note-taking & ability to identify key concepts
 - Summarising, paraphrasing & critiquing skills

Common Pitfalls in Academic Writing

Daft (1985) specifies the top ten reasons why 111 articles were rejected from the Academy of Management Journal and Administrative Sciences Quarterly...

Daft, R.L. (1985) 'Why I Recommended that Your Manuscript be Rejected and What You Can Do about It.' In: Publishing in the Organizational Sciences. Cummings, L.L. & Frost, P.J. (eds.) Homewood, IL: Irwin, pp. 193-209.

1. No theory
2. Insufficient definition of theory
3. Concepts not aligned
4. Inadequate research design
5. Insufficient rationale for design
6. Weak macro-structure (organisation & flow)
7. Amateur style and tone
8. Not relevant to field
9. Over-engineering of work
10. Conclusions not in alignment

Common Pitfalls in the Literature Review

In a more recent article in a different field, McKercher et al. (2007) found 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)

The 3 Key Components of a Literature Review...

1. Summary (succinct)
2. Synthesis
3. Critique (own voice)

Critical Appraisal of Information Sources

An In-depth Process

[Adapted from: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm>]

1. INITIAL APPRAISAL

A. Author

- Author's credentials? Educational background, past publications or experience? Topic on author's area of expertise?
- Institutional affiliation? What are basic values or goals of the organisation or institution?
- Author recommended by professors? Name cited in other sources or bibliographies?

B. Date of Publication

- When was the source published?
- Is the source current or out-of-date for the topic?

Critical Appraisal of Information Sources

An In-depth Process

[Adapted from: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm>]

C. Edition or Revision

- First edition of this publication? [Newer editions indicate revisions and updates to reflect changes in knowledge; they may also include omissions] *Use most recent edition, where possible...*

D. Publisher/Title of Journal

- 'Scholarly' or popular?

Critical Appraisal of Information Sources

An In-depth Process

[Adapted from: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm>]

2. CONTENT ANALYSIS

A. Objective Reasoning

- Is information in sources fact, opinion, or propaganda? Scrutinise the text, as skilled writers can make their *interpretations/personal opinions* seem like facts...
- Does data given/referred to appear to be valid and well-researched, or, questionable and unsupported with evidence? Note any errors or omissions...

B. Coverage

- Does work update other sources, substantiate other materials read, or add new information?
- Is the material primary or secondary in nature? *[Note: When choosing materials for assignments, use primary sources wherever possible]*

Critical Appraisal of Information Sources

An In-depth Process

[Adapted from: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm>]

C. Writing Style

- Is the macro-structure of the source logical?
- Is the author's argument repetitive?
- Readability: Stilted or incoherent?

D. Evaluative Reviews

Locate critical reviews of the literature, if possible...

- Texts considered to be valuable contributions to the field?
- Does reviewer mention other - better sources? If so, locate them
- Do the various reviewers agree on the value or attributes of the literature or has it aroused controversy among the critics?

The Literature Review

Critiquing the Literature

Argument/Evidence

- Read texts carefully, examine evidence provided by author
- Is the argument logically structured?
- Identify the range of evidence (opinions or observations, research, case studies, statistics, facts, quotations, etc.)
- Assess how author presents & discusses alternative perspectives in relation to his/her own thesis statement
- Locate any gaps or inconsistencies in the development of the arguments

The Literature Review

Critiquing the Literature

Relevance/Consistency

- Analyse text in relation to aims and objectives of your work, and in relation to other texts read
- Identify the assumptions, biases, perspectives that influence the author. How do they compare to others?
- If it is an opposing perspective, also identify the assumptions, biases, perspectives that influence the writer
- Determine how this source contributes to your understanding, or generates new questions in your thinking

Create a Matrix for your Literature

	Source # 1	Source # 2	Source # 3
Discipline			
Main topic/ hypothesis			
Evidence			
Methodology			
Results			
Critical/theoretical Concepts			
Conclusion/answers			

[NB: Your matrix may look different to this: The number and type of sources you are working with, and your research questions, will influence the items in the left column]

Simple Steps for the Literature Review

[Reproduced with permission from the University of Washington, Bothell]

- **Organise** your literature by detecting a pattern that helps you explain why one group of sources produces one answer and a different group, another. Using a matrix is a very effective way of doing this.
- **Summarise** the contents of these groups in terms of how they address the question: which methodology, evidence, critical concepts...do they employ?
- **Analyse** the content of these sources in terms of the answer they provide to your central question(s) or in terms of the questions they raise. Important insights offered? Particular areas neglected?

The Literature Review

Paragraph Structures

Paragraphs within the literature review can take many forms; the following is representative of a typical paragraph structure...

- A concept is introduced/a point is made (topic sentence)
- It is supported with references or previous research results
- More support is added (where relevant) with citations
- If there is information refuting or contradicting the point, it is added
- Further negative evidence is added (if any)
- The different points of view are compared and contrasted
- A paragraph conclusion is drawn, with some restating of/reference to the topic sentence in own voice

Exercise 1: Paragraph Structures

- Look at **Exercise 1** on your handout and identify the typical paragraph structure used in the given extract. In addition, highlight any...
 - evidence of synthesis
 - examples of writer's voice/critique of the text

Expressing a Point of View & Achieving Coherence

- Literature Reviews should not only provide information on the texts referred to, but should also express the **writer's point of view** on the literature. This may also be referred to as the **writer's voice**.
- **Connectors** (and reporting verbs) often divulge the writer's stance on an issue/argument...

Sentence Connectors

[Adapted from: Swales & Feak (1994)]

	Subordinators	Sentence Connectors	Phrase Linkers
Addition		Furthermore, ... In addition, ... Moreover,in addition to...
Cause & Effect	...because... Since ..., ...	As a result,, consequently,, hence ...	Because of ... Due to ... As a result of ...
Clarification		That is,	
Contrast	While ...,, whereas ...	In contrast, ... However, ... Conversely, ...	Unlike ..., ...
Illustration		For example, ... For instance, ...	
Intensification		On the contrary, ... In fact, ...	

Information:

John is a) old, b) unattractive & c) very rich

Same information, different points of view...

Identify the writer's viewpoint in each of these sentences...

- John is old and unattractive. However, he is incredibly wealthy.
- John is very rich. Nevertheless, he is old and unattractive.
- Despite the fact that John is old and unattractive, he usually has much success in enticing partners. This fact could be attributed to his material wealth.
- John has some qualities; for example, he is very wealthy. On the other hand, he has the unwanted characteristics of being old and unattractive.
- While Peter is young and handsome, John is rather old and ugly. In fact, John's appearance is a little offensive to the eye.

Exercise 2: Connectors - Coherence & Voice

- Parts a) and b) of **Exercise 2** provide some keywords about two different topics.
- Using a variety of connectors, create a total of four sentences, two for each part (a and b) where the sentence pair offers a different voice or point of view.

Exercise 3: Evaluating Three Short Reviews...

- Comment on the three brief reviews written for a history course on beer drinking habits in Medieval England.
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each, and which review is reasonably well written?

Possible Answers...Review 1

Strengths

- Appears to describe subject of book
- Provides summary of content, albeit somewhat lengthy

Weaknesses

- Inappropriately referenced
- Reviewer's voice not evident
- Specific details should serve to illustrate reviewer's points and/or arguments
- Critical appraisal of book is missing

TIP: Remember to provide concise commentary of the literature

Possible Answers...Review 2

Strengths

- Assessment of the book attempted
- Reasons for negative opinions are given

Weaknesses

- Inappropriately referenced
- Judgmental, and in parts – colloquial
- Working knowledge of book's arguments appears to be lacking
- Examples given do not form clearly into a comprehensive summary
- Reader understands what the reviewer *expected* – but not what the author intended
- Assessment is not analytical

TIP: Critique literature by including positive & negative content evaluation

Possible Answers...Review 3

Strengths

- Combines balanced opinion with concrete examples in the form of a commentary
- Reader can sense the writer's purpose for writing
- Reviewer's position is clear – i.e.: analysis from feminist perspective
- Good use of formal expressions
- Engaging analysis – reader can choose to agree/disagree with opinions
- Recommendation to a potential audience

Weaknesses

- Book's year of publication is missing

TIP: Always check review to ensure complete and accurate information is provided; synthesise information with other literature, where possible

Exercise 4

- **Exercise 4** examines the use of tenses in the Literature Review, and the citational patterns often employed.
- Read the information provided on your handout. Identify a pattern in the use of tenses...

Final Thoughts...

- *The literature review forms an important chapter in the thesis, where its purpose is to provide the background justification for the research undertaken (Bruce, 1994:218).*
- *A literature review should demonstrate a fully professional grasp of the background theory (Philips & Pugh, 2005: 57).*
- *In a literature review, a writer extracts and synthesises the main points, issues, findings and research methods which emerge from a critical review of the readings (Nunan, 1992: 217).*
- *Literature reviews should be succinct and...give a picture of the state of knowledge and of major questions in your topic area (Bell, 2005:110).*
- **Good luck!**

Suggested Reading

- Bell, J. (2005) *Doing Your Research Project* (4th edn.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Bruce, C.S. (1994) *Research Students' Early Experiences of the Dissertation Literature Review.* *Studies in Higher Education*. 19 (2): 217-29.
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- Gummesson, E. (2000) *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*. London: Sage.
- Machi, L.A. & McEvoy, B.T. (2009) *Literature Review: Six Steps to Success*. USA: Corwin Press.
- Nunan, D. (1992) *Research Methods in Language Learning*. Cambridge: CUP.

Suggested Reading

- Philips, P.M. & Pugh, D.S. (2005) How to Get a PhD (4th edn.). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ridley, D. (2008) The Literature Review: A Step-by-Step Guide for Students. London: Sage Publications.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2008) Research Methods for Business Students. London: Prentice Hall.



Thank you for your attention.

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