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Spring Semester 2018 – Literature Reviews

Curriculum-aligned

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What is a Literature Review?

- a survey of literature on a particular subject or area of interest
- a discussion of which researchers in the discipline agree/disagree with each other & why



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What a literature review is not

It is not a disorganised repetition of all you have read.

It is not just a summary of previous research.



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A literature review is:

- a point of departure for a research project or thesis
- background information on the area of research
- an organised, critical discussion or review of relevant literature



Why do we do them?

- To understand the main ideas in research on a topic
- To develop understanding of current questions in the field of research
- To justify a research question and show a gap in research
- To learn about methods used in a specific research area
- To identify points of agreement and disagreement
- To build your professional vocabulary



What does a literature review do?

- It *showcases* how you understand and assess relevant literature
- It *positions* your research in relation to *current debates* on the topic
- It *provides rationale* for your research by pointing to a *gap* in the literature



Things you need to do



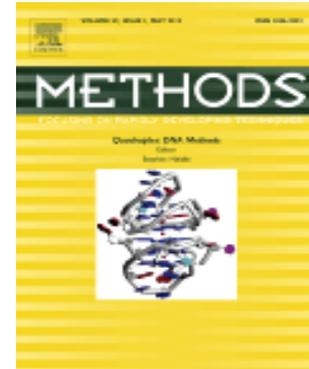
Check the instructions carefully - are you asked to:

- **provide an overview of the topic?**
- **survey current or past research?**
- **compare theories, methods or models?**
- **draw conclusions about current knowledge on the topic?**



Ask questions to help you choose research literature

- What specific research question does my literature review define?
- Is this literature review about theory, methods or policy?
- Is it about quantitative or qualitative methods?
- Is it about the effectiveness of methods?



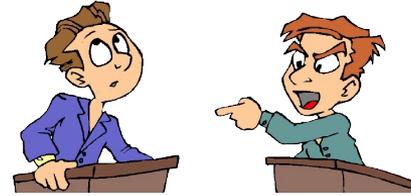
E.g. **HAS234** → Literature review instructions

- Research literature on a topic relevant to social work about a sub-population of interest.
- Base your review on your search strategy and research question.
- Bring the material together to form a literature review by:
 - critically reviewing the literature
 - showing why your research question is needed
 - evaluating the gap in previous literature



More questions to help you choose literature

- What is the scope?
- How can I be sure to only use relevant materials?
- Have I critically evaluated the literature?
- Do I understand
 - the controversies or disagreements in previous and present research?
 - the methodological/theoretical flaws in previous research?
- Can I see gaps that my research can fill?



Getting started

- **Collect** readings based on your ‘key words’ database searches relevant to your investigation topic.
- **Skim and scan** your readings to gain a quick overview of each resource and its main ‘thesis’. Consider the Abstract, Introduction, Headings, Conclusion and Key words.
- **Set up** a note-taking template to allow to you to compare key content and your responses.
- **Then start to read more deeply** and begin to evaluate the connections between ideas as well as differences.



Read, take notes & categorise by

- **concepts,**
- **methods,**
- **theories,**
- **philosophical differences/similarities,**
- **chronological order**

- **Outline**
- **the main ideas to organize the review**



Sample model for taking notes to compare papers

| PAPER | MAIN MESSAGE | WHAT DO / THINK? |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Marmot, M 2005, 'Social determinants of health', <i>Lancet</i>, vol 365, no. 9464, pp. 1099-1104.</p> | <p>Marmot's (2005) looking at the links between poverty, inequality & their causes, as a way of understanding these factors in relationship to health.</p> | <p>He seems to refer to global economic issues as well as what these mean locally... Not sure how this'll work with my essay..... Come back to it.</p> |
| <p>Anderson, I et al. 2006, 'Indigenous health in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific', <i>Lancet</i>, vol 367, no. 9524, pp. 1775-1785</p> | <p>Anderson et al. use case studies from 3 regions to survey the state of Indigenous health & review the connections between identified health areas & policy.</p> | <p>I like the way this paper looks at the connections between government policies & health in these communities. Still need to read a bit more about social determinants ... Complicated. But think I can see a way to draw on Marmot. Yaaay!</p> |

Some different ways to organise the information

- Chronological: according to historical or developmental context.
- Classical: Discuss the major significant writings.
- Topical: Create sections based on topics or conceptual ideas.
- Start with a broad perspective and become more specific.



Make your focus appropriate for the topic

Focus on what has been
found out earlier, e.g.
concepts

OR
Focus on who did the
research, e.g. the
researchers

Image caption



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Critically examine the literature

- What are the main **ideas / problems**?
- Can you put the research in a **historical or cultural context**?
- Is this **context significant**? Why or why not?
- What **agreement** is there about ideas or practice?
- Are there points of **disagreement** about key topics?
- What are the main **methods or techniques** used in this type of research?
- What are the **differences** between the them?
- Does this help you find a **new perspective**?
- Now you understand previous research can you find **gaps or productive approaches** for further research?



Now:

- Link your reading to your question. Show how it supports or extends knowledge.
- Highlight strengths, weaknesses or omissions.
- Critique the research.
- Use evaluative language
- Demonstrate your perspectives in relation to your question.



Writing Tips

- Think about whether to organise your review with sub-headings.
- Take time to orientate the reader to the topic.
- Give an outline of the reasons for the review.
- Identify the core themes in the literature you will review.
- Organise the review of the literature by themes.
- In your conclusion summarise your review and evaluate the current research.
- Point out any gaps or limitations in current research for future research.

State your perspective

State your theoretical position clearly.

Link your critical evaluations to this position.

Use language that shows

→ your perspective

→ the perspectives of writers you review

Language for **degree of certainty**:

may, it is necessary, it is probable, it is possible...

Language for **attitude**:

Adjectives: *perceptive, passionate*

Reporting Verbs: *argues, proposes, suggests* (see I Day List)

Language for **emphasis**

must, should, necessitates,...



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CONTENTS with HEADINGS and SUBHEADINGS if needed

Don't forget to include references

INTRODUCTION

-Topic

-Background

-Outline of main
points

-Publications

-Aim

BODY

3-5 main points

Discuss each point
in a separate paragraph / section

CONCLUSION

Summary

Evaluation

Assess achievements
& shortcomings



Take time to orientate your reader: Introduction

Topic Sentence

Orient the reader to the overall topic.

Background

Provide brief background on the topic, e.g. a key word / historical context

Outline your main points or scope

Let the reader know how the review will be organised.

Publications

What are the main publications?

Provide reasons for the review. What is your aim?



Body

3 to 5 main points

Discuss each point in a paragraph

BODY PARAGRAPH

Topic sentence stating main point

Background to the problem

Overview of approaches & relevant researchers

Explanation, Evidence, Examples, Evaluation...



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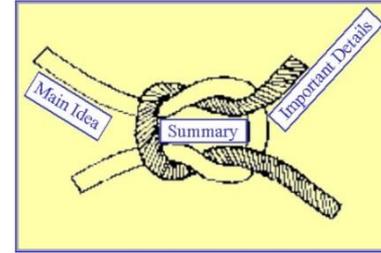
Show the reader a clear evaluation

- Be clear in organising information & how you discuss it.
- Present each point in a new paragraph with a topic sentence.
 - Clarify differences or similarities in the literature.
 - Group earlier methodological differences in the research.
 - Group similarities in methodology, policy or theory.
 - State the current and possible future research questions.



Conclusion

- Summarise your points & your evaluation of research
- Highlight the achievements & shortcomings of current research



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