



Developing a Literature Review

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**POSTGRADUATE ENROLMENT AND THROUGHPUT
PROGRAMME**



Aim of this session

- Discuss the purpose of a literature review
- What competences are needed
- Study the structure of a literature review
- Conceptualise the process of doing your literature review



Defining a Literature Review

The selection of available documents (published and unpublished) on the topic, containing **information, ideas, data and evidence** written from a particular standpoint **to fulfil certain aims or express certain views** on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the **effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.**

Chris Hart. (2001). *Doing a Literature Review*. London: SAGE: 31

What competences will you need?

- ✓ Internet literacy.
- ✓ Curious to find out what sorts of texts and data are available to you in libraries, from journals, encyclopaedias, from experienced colleagues, from the Internet, and ...
- ✓ Systematic, otherwise you will end up confused by what you have and missing reference details.
- ✓ Selective, otherwise you will end up with too much.
- ✓ Referencing skills.
- ✓ Ready for disappointments: sometimes you will not find what you need, and you cannot afford to be disheartened, but rather to plan alternative searches.



The purpose of literature review

Discuss the following with a partner.

What purpose will the literature review play in your study ...

- **When you start your research?**
- **As you collect and analyse your data?**
- **As you write up your findings?**

Why review the literature? (1)

WHEN YOU START YOUR STUDY:

- To clarify concepts.
- To review the state of knowledge on the topic.
- To avoid duplication and avoid limitations.
- To identify gaps in the knowledge.
- To understand the problem better.
- To assess whether it is worth doing the study and refine the rationale for your study.
- To define the boundaries of your study.
- To develop or refine your own method.
- To identify what relevant theory has been developed.
- To understand how others have seen the problem.
- To compare past findings with the current situation and setting.

Why review the literature? (2)

AS YOU COLLECT AND ANALYSE YOUR DATA:

- To understand the problem better.
- To make comparisons of your data with that of other researchers.
- To consider how the problem has been tackled in other settings.
- To identify trends in studies and their findings.

Why review the literature? (3)

AS YOU WRITE UP YOUR STUDY:

- To locate your study in the context of the field of knowledge
- To build on evidence provided by previous studies
- To harness some of the authority of other studies
- To show the relationship of your findings to that of other studies
- To demonstrate how similar or different your findings are
- To link your findings with existing theory
- To consider past recommendations

Key questions that a review of the literature can answer

- What are the origins and definitions of the topic?
- What are the key sources and who are the key theorists?
- What are the major issues and debates about the topic?
- How is knowledge on the topic structured and organised?
- What are the political standpoints?
- What are the main questions and problems that have been addressed to date?
- How has the original definition of the topic been developed and changed?

(Adapted from Chris Hart. (2001). *Doing a Literature Review*. London: SAGE: 14 and elaborated on pp30-32)

Identify the features of a literature review (Shamu, 2010)

- a) How does the writer structure the text? Look for sub-headings. Write down the main topic of each paragraph next to it.
- b) Is s/he discussing new knowledge or pre-developed knowledge?
- c) How many different citations and quotations are there?
- d) Is the voice formal and academic, or chatty or narrative?
- e) How does the writer move from discussing the findings of one author to the next?
- f) Is there any level of critical review?



The Features of a Literature Review

- The voice or style is formal and academic.
- It covers previous knowledge on the topic, not current findings by the author.
- Structured around a set of key concepts or themes, or in relation to the key elements of a research study. These “information organizers” could include: content topics, study methods, settings, samples, interventions, findings, recommendations, etc.
- To move from one author to the next, one might compare and contrast, or point out similarities, or introduce a different topic with an introductory sentence.
- Where possible, you should try to engage in some level of critical evaluation of research.

The process of conducting a literature review

1. Identify **key words** (related to your topic or problem).
2. Search for and identify **relevant** information.
3. Obtain copies of the literature.
4. Create your **reference list**
5. Take notes for your literature review.
6. Write your literature review.

Some housekeeping strategies for handling information

- After initial reading, spend time conceptualising a preliminary structure for the literature review; from it derive key words for searching (plus their synonyms).
- In searching, move systematically from the general to the specific.
- As you find literature, save the readings by author's surname with a topical keyword.
- Develop your alphabetical reference list simultaneously and fully as you find literature.
- Find out about the referencing housestyle in advance and if possible, use referencing software from the outset, e.g. Refworks

Some housekeeping strategies for information handling (2)

- Prepare a “map” of the literature, and set up your folders accordingly.
- Be ready to change or add to your map.
- As you read, take notes in the appropriate sub-topic files.
- Keep track of sources as you take notes (Robson, 2007).
- NB!!! Never copy a quotation unless you use quotation marks and note down the source and page no.
- Be selective and prepared to stop.

Organising the Literature Review (Concept Map)

- Look at the structure of this Literature Review titled: **PREVENTIVE STAFF-SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS FOR HEALTH WORKERS** (Van Wyk, 2010)
- How has it been organised?

Critically reviewing the literature

- A critical review is an assessment of whether a research study is:
 - sufficient;
 - whether the focus and strategy is adequate;
 - whether the findings are valid.
- To take a critical position, you need:
 - A good knowledge of the topic;
 - An understanding of the range of research methods and what they imply;
 - An understanding of the concepts “validity”, “reliability” etc, and how they are used in scientific literature.

Selected Questions for Reading a Scientific Article Critically

- Is there a sound rationale for the study?
- Is the aim/objective (or hypothesis) clearly stated?
- Does the hypothesis being tested relate to the problem?
- Is the method appropriate to the study objective?
- Did any aspect of the method bias the study?
- What efforts did the researcher make to ensure the trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the study?
- Was the study sample appropriate? What were its limitations, if any?
- Are the results warranted by the analyses that were undertaken? Or are the results supported by the study?
- Are any ethical dilemmas presented by the study?