ON A SMART TRACK TO WRITING
CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEWS

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“Writing the literature review well is a sign of professional maturity; it indicates one’s grasp of the field, one’s methodological sophistication in critiquing others’ research, and the breadth and depth of one’s reading.”

(Krathwohl, 1988)

You can do

If you want to ......
The literature review forms an important chapter in a thesis where its purpose is to provide the background to and justification for the research undertaken.

(Bruce, 1994)

What other important reasons?
1. What is the ‘literature’ of a literature review?

- it refers to any collection of material on a topic.
- work consulted in order to understand and investigate the research problem.
- could be anything from a set of government pamphlets to scholarly articles.
2. Sources of the Literature

- Journal articles
- Books
- Conference proceedings
- Government & corporate reports
- Newspapers
- Theses & dissertations
- Internet (electronic journal, websites)
- CD-ROM
- Magazines
- Pamphlets
3. What is a literature review?

Note:
A summary – is a recap of the important information of the source.

A synthesis – is a re-organization or a reshuffling of that information.  
- a combined summary from at least 2 sources.

Annotated bibliography - includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources.

- A literature review seeks to describe, summarize, evaluate, clarify and/or integrate the content of primary reports/sources.
3. What is a literature review?

A literature review must:

- Be organized around the topic, and directly related to the research question.
- Synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known.
- Identify areas of controversy in the literature.
- Formulate questions that need further research.
4. Why do a literature review?

The literature review may vary with different types of studies, however, the main reason is to find the knowledge gap.

But, along the track there are many issues that need to be clarified before one finalizes on the gap.

  e.g. definitions, context, weaknesses, etc.
5. What should be done before writing a literature review?

- Clarify
- Find models of writing the review
- Narrow your topic
- Consider whether your sources are current
6. How to write a literature review?

- Find a focus (scope)

- Construct a thesis statement
  - a statement that will argue for a particular perspective on the material

- Consider organization:
  - Introduction: e.g., central theme
  - Body of text: can be chronologically, thematically, or methodologically
  - Conclusions/Recommendations: what you have drawn so far
6a. What to do: Evaluate Key Issues

Some of the key issues you need to evaluate/critique about an article:

- Is the research question significant and is the work original and important?
- Have the instruments used been demonstrated as reliable and valid?
- Do the outcome measures relate clearly to the variables with which the investigation is concerned?
- Does the research design fully test the hypothesis?
- Are the subjects representative of the population to which generalizations are made?
- Did the researcher observe ethical rules?
- Has the research reached such a stage that publication is justified and the results are meaningful?
6b. What to do: Use Evaluation Criteria

- To some extent, the ability to review articles is something that requires practice and experience.

- However, the process can be aided by following a checklist of things to look out for and comparing the paper under review to the criteria.
6c. What to do: Understand the Evaluation Criteria

MAIN CRITERIA:

- **Introduction** ........................................... Why did they start the research?
- **Methods** .................................................. What did they do?
- **Results** ..................................................... What did they find?
- **Discussion** ................................................. What do the results mean?
6d. What to do: Write a Good Literature

- A good review should be well-written and readable, with a sound structure, presentation and a logical sequence.

- Overall it should have an appropriate intellectual level and provide evidence of at least some originality.
7. What to bear in mind?

- **Remember the purpose** — to show why your research needs to be carried out, not just to tell what other researchers have done.

- **Read with a purpose** — to summarize & emphasize, to look for major concepts, conclusions, theories, arguments etc.

- **Write with a purpose** — to evaluate & show relationships between the work already done, and between your own study; to be organized.

- **Use evidence (as in academic paper)**

- **Be selective**

- **Summarize and synthesize**

- **Keep your own voice**

- **Use caution when paraphrasing (be accurate)**
8. Some questions for your guidance

- What is the specific problem or research question that my literature review helps to define?

- What type of literature review am I conducting?
  - Am I looking at issues of theory? methodology? policy? quantitative research (e.g. on the effectiveness of a new procedure? Qualitative research (e.g. studies)?

- What is the scope of my literature?
  - What types of publications am I using (journals, books, popular media etc.)?
  - What discipline am I working in (e.g. sociology, medicine, management)?

- There many more questions....
9. What not to do?

- Trying to read everything!
- Reading but not writing!
- Not keeping the bibliographic information!
- A list describing or summarizing one piece of literature after another. It is usually a bad sign to see every paragraph beginning with the name of a researcher!
THANK YOU

&

WISHING YOU ALL THE BEST