MANAGING AND REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

2.00pm – 5.00pm, Wednesday 14th March 2007

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Venue: Guild Seminar Room 2, 1st Floor Guild Village

Presenter: Joanne Griffiths
jgriffit@cyllene.uwa.edu.au

http://www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au/learning
http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au

Graduate Research School
WORKSHOP OUTLINE

2.00 – 2.10: Introduction

2.10 – 2.35: What is the purpose of a literature review?

2.35 – 2.45: Using the library

2.45 – 3.15: Surveying the literature – the search

3.15 – 3.30: Tea break

3.30 – 3.55: Recording and organising the literature

3.55 – 4.20: A critical review of the literature

4.20 – 4.30: Writing the literature review

4.30 – 5.00: Evaluation and close
OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

- Using Library resources to locate literature relevant to your thesis topic
- To discuss methods for storing and managing the literature
- To examine the purposes of writing a literature review
- To identify the elements of a good literature review
- To recognise the need for critical thinking when evaluating a body of material
- To learn to synthesis ideas in the development of a reasoned argument leading to your hypothesis.

One element of thesis writing that is often not given enough attention is the finding, managing and reviewing of literature. Not paying enough attention to these tasks will have significant consequences for your thesis.

Today’s workshop is focused on effective literature searching and writing techniques.

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<th>LITERATURE REVIEW: USE AND APPLICATION</th>
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<td><strong>HIGH QUALITY THESIS</strong></td>
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<td>Expert use of the literature in the design of the study and discussion of the findings.</td>
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<td>Thorough, clear and incisive reporting of the literature, comprehensive and definitive</td>
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<td>Up to date, highly relevant material</td>
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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A LITERATURE REVIEW?

Questions:

1. What is a literature review?

2. In addition to increasing your knowledge of your research topic, what other skills might it develop?
Literature Review: Definition

The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the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.


**Purposes of a literature review:**

1. Distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done.
2. Discovering important variables relevant to the topic
3. Synthesising and gaining a new perspective
4. Identifying relationships between ideas and practice
5. Establishing the context of a topic or a problem
6. Rationalising the significance of a problem
7. Enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary
8. Understanding the structure of the subject
9. Relating ideas and theory to applications
10. Identifying the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used
11. Placing the research in an historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments

(Hart, 1998, p.27)
WHY DO A LITERATURE REVIEW?

While the form of the literature review may vary with different types of studies, the basic purposes remain constant. In general, the literature review should:

- Provide a context for the research
- Justify the research
- Ensure the research has not been done before
- Show where the research fits into the existing body of knowledge/provide a context for the research
- Enable the researcher to learn from previous theory on the subject.
- Illustrate how the subject has been studied previously
- Critique previous research
- Identify gaps or controversies in previous research
- Show that the work is adding to the understanding and knowledge of the field
- Help refine, focus or even change the topic

From the outset you should be aware that searching and reviewing the literature is an ongoing task. The literature review itself should not be thought of as a discrete or stand-alone segment of your thesis. In many ways, it penetrates the thesis to give it strength and authority. Your literature review is best considered an on-going process that you should be committed to throughout the course of your research. The techniques of searching for, analysing and critiquing relevant literature are used in many stages of your thesis project. Literature searching and evaluation permeates the thesis writing process at many levels.
SURVEYING THE LITERATURE: THE SEARCH

SEARCHING FOR LITERATURE

The term *literature search* refers to a ‘*systematic and thorough search of all types of published literature in order to identify as many items as possible that are relevant to a particular topic*’ (Gash, 2000, p.1).

The sorts of material you might find will be diverse, perhaps including any or all of the following:
- Books (textbooks, monographs, and treatises)
- Journal articles (including from e-journals)
- Reports
- Official publications (often published by governments)
- Papers given at conferences and seminars
- Theses
- Patents
- Audio-visual material

Finding a research topic:
At this stage - the initial or background reading period - there is little critical analysis. You will survey the area historically and thematically using key word searches. If you are only beginning to become conversant with the context of the chosen field of study and with the vocabulary and methodologies used, then the scope of your survey will necessarily be broad. Soon, you will begin to negotiate the parameters of the research so that they are narrower.

It is important that you work effectively toward narrowing the scope of your search quickly. Constructing a viable thesis argument demands this.

Journal articles will increasingly become more important as your focus intensifies. They are useful because they often include recommendations or suggestions for further work and represent current thinking in the area of interest.

Your supervisor can also assist you greatly in identifying potential research topics. It is only as you refine your topic that the feasibility of your study will become evident.
ACTIVITY

Have you decided on the criteria you will use to narrow the scope of your literature searches? Consider time frames, keywords, themes, etc. Write your criteria for your own research.

Write down your research question:

Criteria to narrow scope of literature search:
It is vitally important to keep clear and accurate records of what you have been reading. This not only includes the complete bibliographic reference, the source where the reference was found, its location and availability, an annotation or abstract, but also an evaluation of the material.

The advantages of keeping a record of the literature you are reading:
1. It will allow you to show your supervisor exactly what you have accomplished.
2. It will ensure that your bibliography is complete. That is, in the final stages of your project you are less likely to be hunting for bibliographic details of sources.

EXAMPLES OF CARD SYSTEM
This is good for a smaller number of sources. Endnote is good for a larger number of sources.


Streams of Cultural Capital (esp. chapter 2, Consumption, Duration, History)

Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.

Reid Library

Hssmn 303.482 1997 STR

7 day loan
Chapter two examines questions arising from the transpositions and recontextualizations of cultural objects across and between national borders. It questions how cultural hegemony is refused, diffused, disseminated, appropriated and practiced. The author argues that transnational movements of cultural objects challenge the notions of a simply produced and absorbed universal culture that is understood solely as an amplified, single-nation model.

Exercise:

Outline a literature management system you can or will use to manage your references.

Consider what strategies you will use to:

• Record reference details
• Keep track of your evaluation notes for each article, chapter etc.
• Store hardcopies of journal articles and so forth so that they can be easily retrieved.

Discuss this with your peers. Use their feedback to refine your own system.
MAKING NOTES ON THE LITERATURE

It is highly recommended that you make more extensive notes on the material as you read it. You can use a checklist as a more systematic means for recording information about what it is you are reading. For instance, you might think about and record the following, but you might tailor your own criteria as you see fit:

- Has the author formulated a problem, what is it?
- Is the problem clearly defined, is its significance clearly established?
- What methodologies has the researcher employed?
- What is the author’s theoretical framework?
- Has the author evaluated the literature relevant to the problem/issue?
- How does the author structure the argument?
- In what way does the research contribute to an understanding of the problem under study?
- How does this book or article relate to the specific thesis question I am developing?

Intrinsic to these questions is the notion that you should be thinking critically about the literature in front of you, that is, you are evaluating it rather than simply reviewing it. This is something we will look at in more detail shortly.

Identifying vital sources:
At this point (still at the research proposal stage) you have identified a body of current, highly relevant literature that you have used to refine your thesis question. By subjecting the material to the above evaluation process you can discard what is not relevant.

There is no reason now for you to delay the writing of your literature review.

It should be designed to show the ‘weaknesses’ of past studies and what has to be done to move forward in the field. This means that you will be subjecting the material you are reading to a further process of critical thinking.

Evaluation is very much part of the narrowing process. However, when you have selected the key works that you want to cite in your literature review, it is time to subject the ideas put forward in the material to sceptical inquiry. We do this in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses.
A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF CRITICAL THINKING?

When you think critically you do not accept information at face value.

**Question:** We all think critically in many everyday situations – in other words there are instances when we consciously suspend belief and put a greater emphasis on evaluating the truth and accuracy of the information that is being presented to us.

Can anyone suggest some examples of when these situations might arise?

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<th>Example 1) When you watch advertisements on television, for example, that imply that if you buy a certain kind of car you are going to feel substantially more successful and your life will be perfect [like the characters in the advertisement] you are sceptical and critical. You know that purchasing a car bears only a limited causal relationship to issues of personal happiness.</th>
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<td>Example 2) When you listen to politicians attempting to justify a policy to the public, you listen to their justifications and response critically, because you know they are trying to persuade you to accept their opinion or policy.</td>
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Let’s unpack then the way in which arguments are presented to us. Firstly, what is an argument?

Argumentation really is the vehicle of intellectual enquiry. Scholars will not just state what they think, but give some reasons or evidence to support their contentions.

**One argument model might look like this:**
- Premise
- Evidence
- Evidence
- Evidence
- So/therefore [indicator word] Conclusion

**A simple example:**
“There are three factors which show that free enterprise ideal does not fir our economic system at the this time. First of all, unionisation protects labour from vulnerability to market conditions. Secondly, government supports and regulates industry. Thirdly, protective tariffs work selectively to isolate some domestic products from foreign competition”.
Three ways to read and discuss texts:

1. Restatement
   “American soldiers in World War 1 contracted venereal disease in far greater numbers than soldiers of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, who had condoms”.

2. Description
   “The passage compares the prevention techniques and diseases of American and New Zealand soldiers in World War 1. It notes that American soldiers contracted venereal disease in far greater numbers than soldiers of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, who had condoms”.

3. Interpretation/Analysis
   “By examining the outcomes of various approaches to condom use during World War 1, the text argues for honest and realistic approaches to health prevention in the future. However to sustain this argument, information is needed about the relative size of the American and New Zealand forces”.
INTEGRATING MATERIAL INTO A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In writing a review of the literature, you are obliged to situate your research question or hypothesis in the context of previous work. You must do this in such a way as to explain and justify the decisions you are making. What is required to accomplish this is a step-by-step explanation of your decisions, punctuated by references to studies that support your ongoing argument.

Step one: The review of literature is not the place to display everything you have read on the subject to date. You must be selective and only include studies that are critically relevant to your research. However, in the first instance it is helpful to set forth the broad pattern of knowledge as it exists in the area in order to appeal for the reader’s acceptance of the logic you are about to present. So, pose here your research question, then the specific hypothesis through which the question will be answered.

Step two: Organize the literature review into sections that present themes or identify trends, including relevant theory. You are not trying to list all the material published, but to synthesize and evaluate it according to the guiding concept of your thesis or research question. Here is where you can really show the reader that you have evaluated the quality of the information.

Step three: Identify the line of argumentation you want to pursue. Now you need to marshal evidence for your thesis from the material that you have selected and grouped thematically. Without referring to the specific details in the articles, summarise in one or two paragraphs the combined findings of each cluster of studies. As you present your argument, identify gaps in the research that your study will fill. Also show how your study will extend the knowledge that has already been established.

Step four: Write a conclusion that summarises and reiterates your argument.

Other Useful Resources:

Websites: http:www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html  
http://www.library.cqu.edu.au/litreviewpages/tips.htm

LL&RS Workshops: see website at www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au/learning