MANAGING AND REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

9.00am – 12.00pm, Friday 23rd March 2007

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

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STUDY Smarter
Learning, Language and Research Skills
WORKSHOP OUTLINE

9.00 – 9.10: Introduction

9.10 – 9.40: Why do a literature review?

9.40 – 10.00: Finding a research topic

10.00 – 10.30: Recording and evaluating the readings

10.30 – 10.45: Tea Break

10.45 – 11.10: Developing reasoned arguments

11.10 – 11.20: Deconstructing arguments

11.20 – 11.45: Integrating the material into a review of literature

11.45 – 12.00: Revisiting of Workshop Objectives, Evaluation and Close
OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

- To examine the purposes of writing a literature review
- To identify the elements of a good literature review
- To become familiar with the steps involved in writing a literature review
- To recognise the need for critical thinking when evaluating a body of material.
- To learn to synthesise 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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**Question:** What is a review of literature? Besides increasing your knowledge of your research topic, what other skills might it develop?
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, one that you should be committed to throughout your project. 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.

Question: The word ‘citation’ means ‘reference to another author’. The use of citations is an important aspect of academic writing. What advantages are there in the meticulous use of citations?
A Literature Review must:

1. Be organised around and related **directly** to the research question you are developing.
2. Synthesize results into a summary of what is known and what is not known.
3. Identify areas of controversy in the literature.
4. Formulate questions that need further research.

A good review

- leads the reader to the frontiers of knowledge in the area
- formulates hypotheses
  (“the ideas that distinguish it from a catalogue of facts” Lindsay 1995, p. 70)

Stages in writing a literature review:

- Survey the literature
- Develop an understanding of the issues
- Subject this understanding to **critical thinking** processes
- Develop a series of reasoned **arguments** that lead to your hypotheses
How should I write a literature review? The following seven steps can be used as a guide when writing your literature review.

1). Surveying the literature (previewing)

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:

- 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
- Research papers
- Encyclopaedias
- Handbooks
- Maps
- Newspapers
- Statistics

Despite the diversity and breadth of your initial reading material, you should try to identify literature which speaks to the topic under investigation. In other words don’t waste time on readings which are not directly related to your intended research topic. Make an appointment with your reference librarian to discuss database searches for relevant material.

**Searching**

- **Where to start?**
  (Get to know your Reference Librarian. What are the key data bases? What types of sources will you use? Will all your sources be academic journals? If not, where to access other materials? How to search effectively?)

- Be systematic in your search and in recording referencing details: consider date, place, author and location

- Be a good sharer
**Question:** have you decided on the criteria you will use to narrow the scope of your literature searches? Consider time frames, keywords, themes etc. Brainstorm some ideas within your group, then write up your own criteria as they relate directly to your research.
2). 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. If your PhD research is somehow an extension of the sort of study you were perhaps doing at the Honours of Masters level, then you have a distinct advantage.

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. The same applies to your supervisor; they can assist you greatly identifying potential research topics). It is only as you refine your topic that the feasibility of your study will become evident.

Here, it is vitally important to keep clear and accurate records of what you 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.
3) Recording and organising the literature

The advantages of keeping a record of the literature you are reading:

- It will allow you to show your supervisor exactly what you have accomplished

- 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 cited two or three years previous.

You will need an organised system to keep track of your references. Methods include EndNote or another computerised referencing system; a computer application such as a spreadsheet or database program; a paper-based file of bibliographic information.

Examples of a card system
This is good for a smaller number of sources. Endnote is good for a larger number of sources.

*Palumbo-Liu, David & Ulrich Gumbrecht, Hans (eds)*

1997

*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.
4). Make 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 begin to think critically about the literature in front of you, that is, you are evaluating it rather than simply reviewing it.
At this point 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 proper. 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.

The need to evaluate what you are reading has already been emphasised. This is very much part of the 'narrowing process'. However, when you have selected the key works that you want to include 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.

ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE OF OUR SAMPLE LITERATURE REVIEW

Notes:
6). Adopt a critical reading approach

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?
Evaluating arguments:

- What is the stated research problem?
- What are the stated research aims? Are they likely to lead to some resolution of the research problem?
- Is appropriate methodology chosen and is it properly applied?
- What is your evaluation of the interpretation of the data presented by the author of the paper?
- Are you convinced by the argument/s presented? On what basis?
- What do other papers on this research topic say? Is there a difference of opinion? Are there differences in data obtained? Are there differences in interpretation? What might account for these differences?
- What observations, data, research, logic or theoretical framework are arguments in the literature based on?
- What assumptions underlie the theoretical framework employed in different papers?
- Do the assumptions always hold? Under what circumstances might they be flawed?
- What assumptions underlie the methods used to collect evidence? Are these assumptions reasonable? Under what circumstances might they be flawed?
- What’s new/ what’s especially valuable about what is contained in this article ie what is its contribution?
- How well does the book or article fulfil the promises set out in the title, abstract/preface and introduction?
- How effective is the methodology?
- How effectively is the argument made? How persuasive is the evidence?
- For its audience, what are the article’s strengths? What are its weaknesses?
DECONSTRUCTING 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. An argument typically consists of the following parts:

- The premise or claim
- The logical reasoning and evidence in support of the claim
- The presentation of opposing views
- A refutation of opposing views
- Conclusion

7). Integrate the 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.

In the **INTRODUCTION**, you should:

- Define or identify the general topic, issue, or area of concern, thus providing an appropriate context for reviewing the literature.
- Point out overall trends in what has been published about the topic; or conflicts in theory, methodology, evidence, and conclusions; or gaps in research and scholarship; or a single problem or new perspective of immediate interest.
- Establish the writer's reason (point of view) for reviewing the literature; explain the criteria to be used in analysing and comparing literature and the organization of the review (sequence); and, when necessary, state why certain literature is or is not included (scope).

In the **BODY**, you should:

- Group research studies and other types of literature (reviews, theoretical articles, case studies, etc.) according to common denominators such as qualitative versus quantitative approaches, conclusions of authors, specific purpose or objective, chronology, etc.
- Summarize individual studies or articles with as much or as little detail as each merits according to its comparative importance in the literature, remembering that space (length) denotes significance.
- Provide the reader with strong "umbrella" sentences at beginnings of paragraphs, "signposts" throughout, and brief "so what" summary sentences at intermediate points in the review to aid in understanding comparisons and analyses.

In the **CONCLUSION** you should:

- Summarize major contributions of significant studies and articles to the body of knowledge under review, maintaining the focus established in the introduction.
- Evaluate the current "state of the art" for the body of knowledge reviewed, pointing out major methodological flaws or gaps in research, inconsistencies in theory and findings, and areas or issues pertinent to future study.
Conclude by providing some insight into the relationship between the central topic of the literature review and a larger area of study such as a discipline, a scientific endeavor, or a profession.

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