

WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?

A literature review is an account of what has been published on a topic **by accredited scholars and researchers**. The aim of a literature review is to show your reader that you have read, and have a good grasp of, the main published work concerning a particular topic or question in your field. This work may be in any format, including online sources. It may be a separate assignment, or one of the introductory sections of a report, dissertation or **thesis**. In the latter two cases in particular, the review will be defined by a guiding concept (e.g. research objective or by the issue or thesis you are arguing and will provide the framework for your further work).

It is very important to note that your review should **NOT be simply a description of what others have published in the form of a set of summaries**, but should take the form of a **critical discussion**, showing insight and an awareness of different arguments, theories and approaches. It should be a synthesis and analysis of the relevant published work, linked at all times to your own purpose and rationale.

PURPOSES OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing a literature review is like entering a scholarly conversation. So you need to know what others have already said: the agreement and disagreement that exist on a certain topic; the things that are taken for granted; the things that nobody talked about.

Besides enlarging your knowledge about the topic, writing a literature review lets you gain and demonstrate **skills** in two areas:

- **information seeking:** the ability to scan the literature efficiently, using manual or computerized methods, to identify a set of useful articles and books;
- **critical appraisal:** the ability to apply principles of analysis to identify unbiased and valid studies.

According to **Caulley** (1992) of La Trobe University, the literature review should:

- compare and contrast different authors' views on an issue
- group authors who draw similar conclusions
- criticise aspects of methodology
- note areas in which authors are in disagreement
- highlight exemplary studies
- highlight gaps in research

- show how your study relates to previous studies
- show how your study relates to the literature in general
- conclude by summarising what the literature says

The purposes of the review are:

- to define and limit the problem you are working on
- to place your study in an historical perspective
- to avoid unnecessary duplication
- to evaluate promising research methods
- to relate your findings to previous knowledge
- to formulate questions that need further research

A good literature review, therefore, is critical of what has been written, identifies areas of controversy, raises questions and identifies areas which need further research.

STRUCTURE:

1. INTRODUCTION:

- Define the general topic;
- Point out general trends in what has been published about;
- Establish the writer's reason (point of view) for reviewing the literature; explain the criteria to be used in analyzing and comparing literature and the organization of the review (sequence).

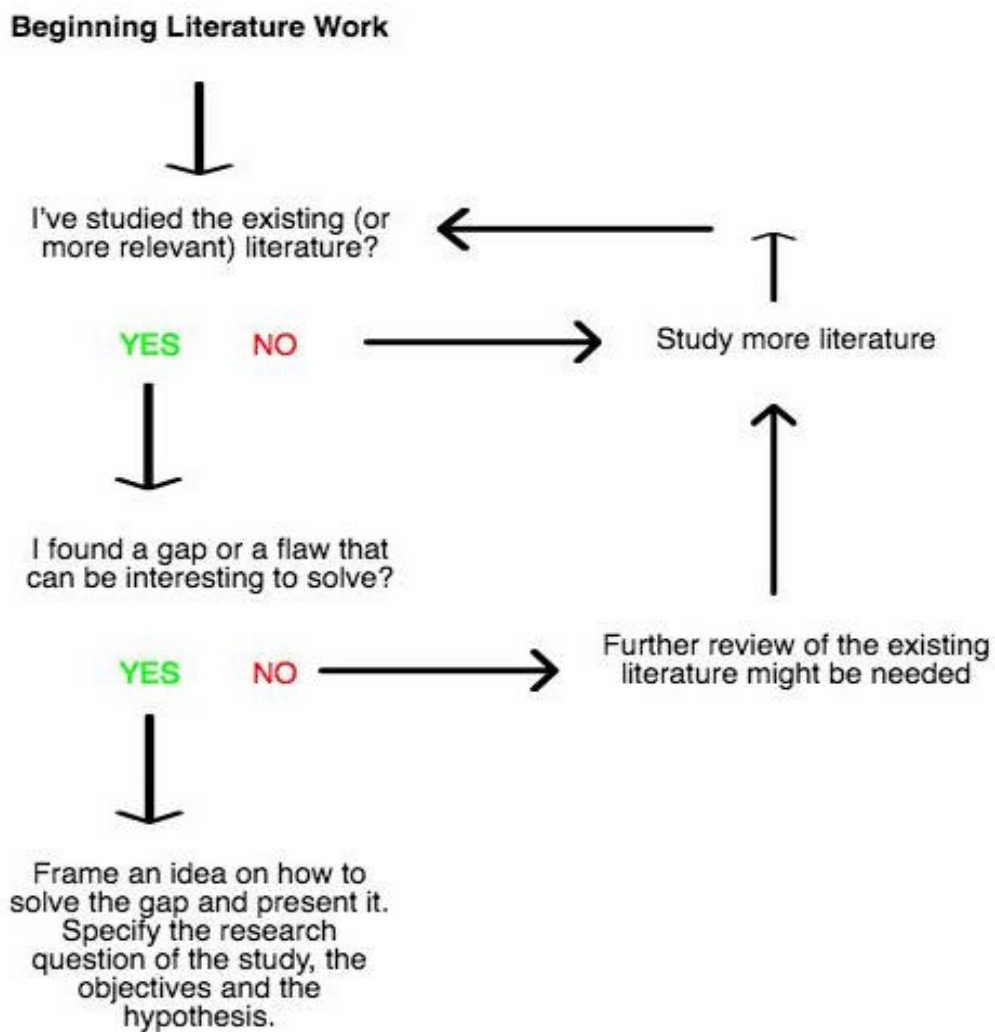
2. BODY:

- Group similar research studies (different criteria: historical period, by publication timing, by trend, thematic);
- Summarize individual studies.

3. CONCLUSIONS:

- Summarize major contributions, maintaining the focus established in the introduction;
- Evaluate the current "state of the art" (flaws and gaps);
- Describe how your study will fill the gaps of the literature and/or improve the "state of the art";
- Present the research question of the study, the objectives and the hypothesis.

Fig. 1 Beginning Literature Work



REFERENCES:

Birmingham City University's Centre for Academy Success (2011), *How to Write a Literature Review*, in *Study guide: Writing*, available online at: <http://library.bcu.ac.uk/learner/writingguides/1.04.htm>

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Thomson, T. (2013), *Not all literature Reviews are the same*, available online at: <https://patthomson.net/2013/05/23/not-all-literature-reviews-are-the-same/>

University of Melbourne's Academic Skills Unit (2016), *Reviewing the Literature, A Critical Review*, available online at: <http://bit.ly/2hj15A0>

FURTHER RESOURCES available online at *Strumenti e Metodi per la Ricerca e la Formazione Dottorale, Sezione Bibliografia Ragionata* : <http://moodle.adaptland.it/mod/page/view.php?id=14498>