



# Doing a Literature Review

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# Doing a Literature Review

This presentation explores the purpose of the Literature Review and gives some tips on producing a good one.

- Reading for Research
- Sources of Information
- Preparing a Literature Review
- Functions of a Literature Review
- Planning your Literature Search
- Strategies for Writing the Literature Review

# Reading for Research

- Carrying out a research project in the social sciences/humanities will almost invariably involve the researcher in a significant amount of reading in their subject area.
- Becoming an expert in the field
- Understand the history of your topic
- The Structure of Scholarship

# Reading for Research

- **Twelve Reasons for Reading for Research**

1. Because it will give you ideas.
2. Because it will help you improve your writing style.
3. Because you need to understand what other researchers have done in your field.
4. To broaden your perspectives and set your work in context.
5. Because your supervisor expects you

# Reading for Research

6. Because it's interesting.
7. To legitimate your arguments.
8. Because it may cause you to change your mind.
9. So that you can better understand the disciplinary traditions within which you are working.
10. So that you can become better at reading.
11. To learn more about research methods and their application in practice.
12. In order to spot areas which have not been researched.

(Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight L. 1999: *How to research*. Buckingham: Open University Press, p.93)

# Sources of Information

- **Primary Sources** of information include first-hand accounts of experimentation and investigation (interviews, questionnaires), original works ( letters, diaries, eyewitness accounts, poems, novels, autobiographies), and reports ( government reports, proceedings of Parliament, annual reports, newspaper reports etc.)
- **Secondary Sources** of information are summaries of information gathered from primary sources ( encyclopaedia articles,

# Sources of Information

## **Online Sources for Literature Review**

The advent of Internet and digitalization has brought the possibilities of online materials.

Databases and online bibliographic information

Learn to use academic databases well

# Sources of Information

## What Makes a Good Source?

- Authoritative sources
- Up-to-date sources
- Accurate sources
- Confidence in your sources

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Exercise: Make a list of sources for your tentative research project



# Preparing a Literature Review

## A literature review:

- Identifies the state of research in the field and connects it to your inquiry
- Brings together the landmark studies with recent research
- Provides a critical evaluation of the literature
- A **literature review** discusses published/unpublished information in a particular subject area, and sometimes information in a particular subject area within a certain time period.

# Preparing a Literature Review

- A **literature review** can be just a simple summary of sources, but it usually has an organizational pattern and combines both *summary* and *synthesis*. While the main focus of an academic research paper/dissertation is to support your own argument, the focus of a literature review is to summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas of others.
- Tracing the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates.

# Functions of a Literature Review

- To give reasons why the topic is of sufficient importance for it to be researched.
- To give an overview of the 'big issues'.
- To provide the reader with a brief up-to-date account and discussion of literature on the issues relevant to the topic.
- To provide a conceptual and theoretical context in which the topic for research can be situated.
- To discuss relevant research carried out on the same topic or similar topics.
- To provide an overview or to guide you on a particular topic.
- To identify gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

# Planning your Literature Search

- Define the topic
- What is the structure of the knowledge on this topic ?
- Think about the limits of your topic
- Finding too much or too little
- What and who are the key works and theorists ? – identifying core texts

# Presenting the Literature Review

## *Common mistakes*

- presenting just a bibliography of literature
- presenting a brief annotated bibliography
- presenting a summary or synopsis of other people's work.
- presenting a review in the chronological order of the publication of each work

# Strategies for Writing the Literature Review

- Have a plan
- Find a focus – structuring your review
- Construct a thesis statement / argument
- Consider organization – Chronological, (by publication, by trend), Thematic, Methodological.
- Begin composition:
  - *Use evidence*
  - *Be selective*
  - *Criticize fairly and openly*
  - *Use quotes sparingly*
  - *Summarize and synthesize*
  - *Keep your own voice*
- Revise, revise, revise

# Strategies for Writing the Literature Review

Be critically engaged with your literature review

- Review texts in their historical moment
- Situate texts in their intellectual moment
- Contextualization: setting the scene
- Select a suitable writing style – literature review as a piece of academic writing

# References and further reading

Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Review* London: Sage, 2011

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Jayadeva Uyangoda, *Writing Research Proposals in the Social and Humanities : A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. Colombo: SSA, 2010.