



**Research
Methodology and
Research Methods**

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Reviewing the Literature

Session # 2

Reviewing the Literature

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Reasons for Writing a Literature Review

Because:

- you need to know what is already known about your research area;
- you can learn from the mistakes of others;
- you can learn about different theoretical and methodological approaches to your research area;
- it may help you to develop an analytic framework;
- it may lead you to consider including variables in your research of which you might not have thought;
- it may suggest further research questions;
- it is required!

Searching the Literature Should Answer These Questions:

- ✓ What is already known about this area?
- ✓ What concepts and theories are relevant?
- ✓ What research methods and strategies have been used in this area?
- ✓ Are there any controversies?
- ✓ Are there any inconsistencies in findings?
- ✓ Are there unanswered questions?

A Literature Review can be...

- a list of relevant theories;
- a search for relevant information;
- a survey of writing on the subject;
- a way of learning about the subject;
- a help in finding dissertation topics and research methods;
- an important component of a dissertation or report.

Adapted from Bruce (1994)

How to Search the Literature I

- Read books and articles you know, or are recommended by your supervisor;
- Keep notes based on your reading;
- Note the keywords used;
- Note other literature which might be interesting later;
- Generate your own keywords.

How to Search the Literature II

- Search your institution's library;
- Search online (using an appropriate database);
- Examine titles and abstracts for relevance;
- Retrieve selected items, read, take notes;
- Check regularly for new material.

How Your Faculty Guide can Help your Reading

- ✓ By giving you a 'starter' reading-list;
- ✓ By mentioning key contributors and/or seminal articles in your field;
- ✓ By giving you a 'credibility' index of writers and journals;
- ✓ By, perhaps, discussing their own research and publications with you.

Getting the Most from Your Reading

- Take lots of notes (including references);
- Ask yourself questions about what you read (its value to your topic, methods used, conclusions);
- Find research questions (perhaps because what you read indicates contention);
- Identify sources to which you will want to return later on;
- Be selective (read for relevance);
- Don't stop reading!!

Searching for Books and Articles

- Start with module reading-lists;
- Consult the references and bibliographies of recommended textbooks;
- Use the library of your institution:
 - to find out what is available,
 - to find out your institution's subscriptions to on-line databases;
- Recommended databases:
 - ABI / Inform
 - EBSCO
 - Proquest

A Word (or two) of Warning about the Internet

- Search engines find sites but do not evaluate them;
- Dictionaries and encyclopaedias are fine for basic definitions, but little else;
- Many Internet sites serve a commercial purpose, so don't be taken in by propaganda;
- Rely on academic sites (usually .ac or .edu), government sites (.gov), not-for-profit institutions (.org), in that order;
- Download and save all material found on the Internet. Sites are dynamic and you may not find the data a second time. Your institution may also require proof when defending your thesis.

Plagiarism: Crime and Punishment I

- Plagiarism means pretending that we, ourselves, wrote what others actually wrote;
- Plagiarism might be accidental:
 - not using quotation marks for direct quotes might be careless rather than deceitful;
 - forgetting to cite a source in the text;
- Plagiarism might not be seen for what it is:
 - recycling our own material from previously submitted work;
 - not referencing ourselves as the author of our own older work.

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Plagiarism: Crime and Punishment II

- Plagiarism is always a crime, since it destroys the foundations of the research edifice;
- Institutions vary in terms of the seriousness with which they view the offence:
 - punishment can range from resubmission to expulsion,
 - but reputation is always lost.

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Questions to Ask When Doing a Literature Review I

- Is your reading list up-to-date?
- Are there any new areas of interest?
- What have you read recently?
- How much time do you allocate to reading?
- What have you learned from your reading?

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Questions to Ask When Doing a Literature Review II

- Has this changed your understanding of your subject area?
- Has your reading influenced your research design?
- Has it given you ideas about your hypotheses and research tools?
- Have you been taking notes from your reading?

Adapted from Bruce, 1994

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Key Points

- ✓ Writing a literature review is a means of reviewing the main ideas and research relating to your chosen area of interest;
- ✓ A competent literature review confirms you as someone who is competent in the subject area;
- ✓ A great deal of the work of writing a literature review is based upon reading the work of other researchers in your subject area; key skills can be acquired to help you get the most from your reading;
- ✓ Systematic review is a method that is gaining in popularity in business research as a way of enhancing the reliability of literature searching and review;
- ✓ Narrative review is a more traditional approach which has advantages of flexibility that can make it more appropriate for inductive research and qualitative research designs.
