



MASSEY UNIVERSITY

# Literature Reviews: An Introduction

Centre for Learner Success



# Literature Review: An Examination of the Key Research on a Topic

***Seeks to answer the following questions:***

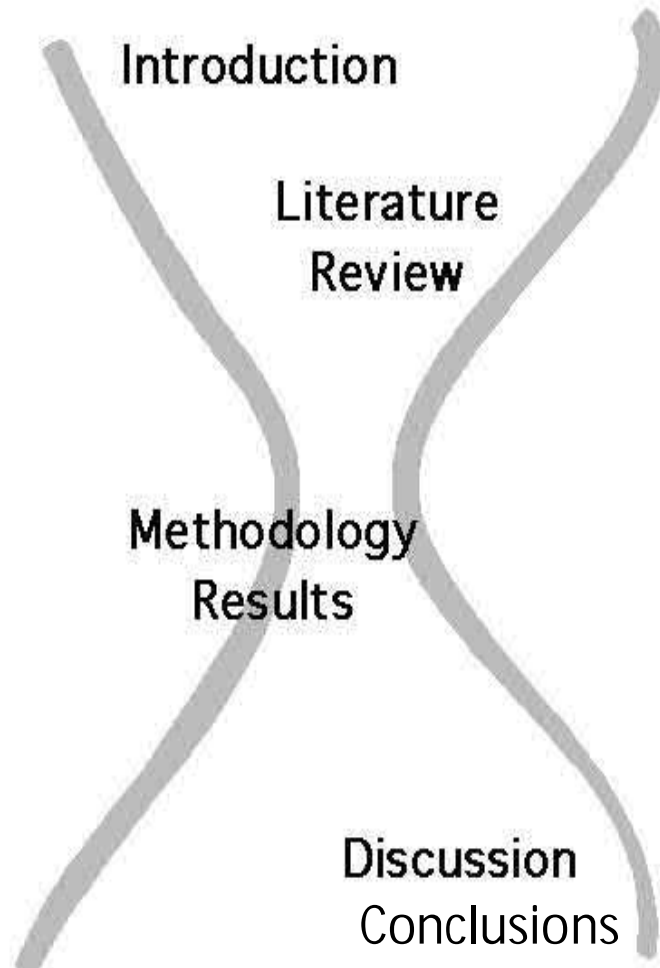
- What have others said about this topic?
- What theories address the topic?
- Which policies address the topic? (If relevant)
- What research has been done previously on the topic?
- Do the results of the existing research agree with one another, or is there disagreement?
- What are the gaps in the existing literature?

# Different uses of literature review in assignments

- ❑ Review leading to research questions/hypotheses
- ❑ Review leading to conclusions on the topic (and recommendations)
- ❑ Review leading to new or adapted theoretical model or framework for new model



# ❑ Review leading to research question(s)



## The story structure of research

- There's this important problem or issue...
- and researchers understand some areas of the problem but others need more research
- a specific area requiring more research is this...and it's important because...
- so what I did was...
- and found that....
- which means we now know this.

(Adapted from Paltridge & Starfield, 2007)

# Structure for Introduction → Literature Review

Provide the reader with a context/setting for your research  
General problem requiring attention and evidence of significance of problem



Narrow down to specific aspect of the problem under investigation  
Your specific topic area – what does the research say about its connection with the problem?



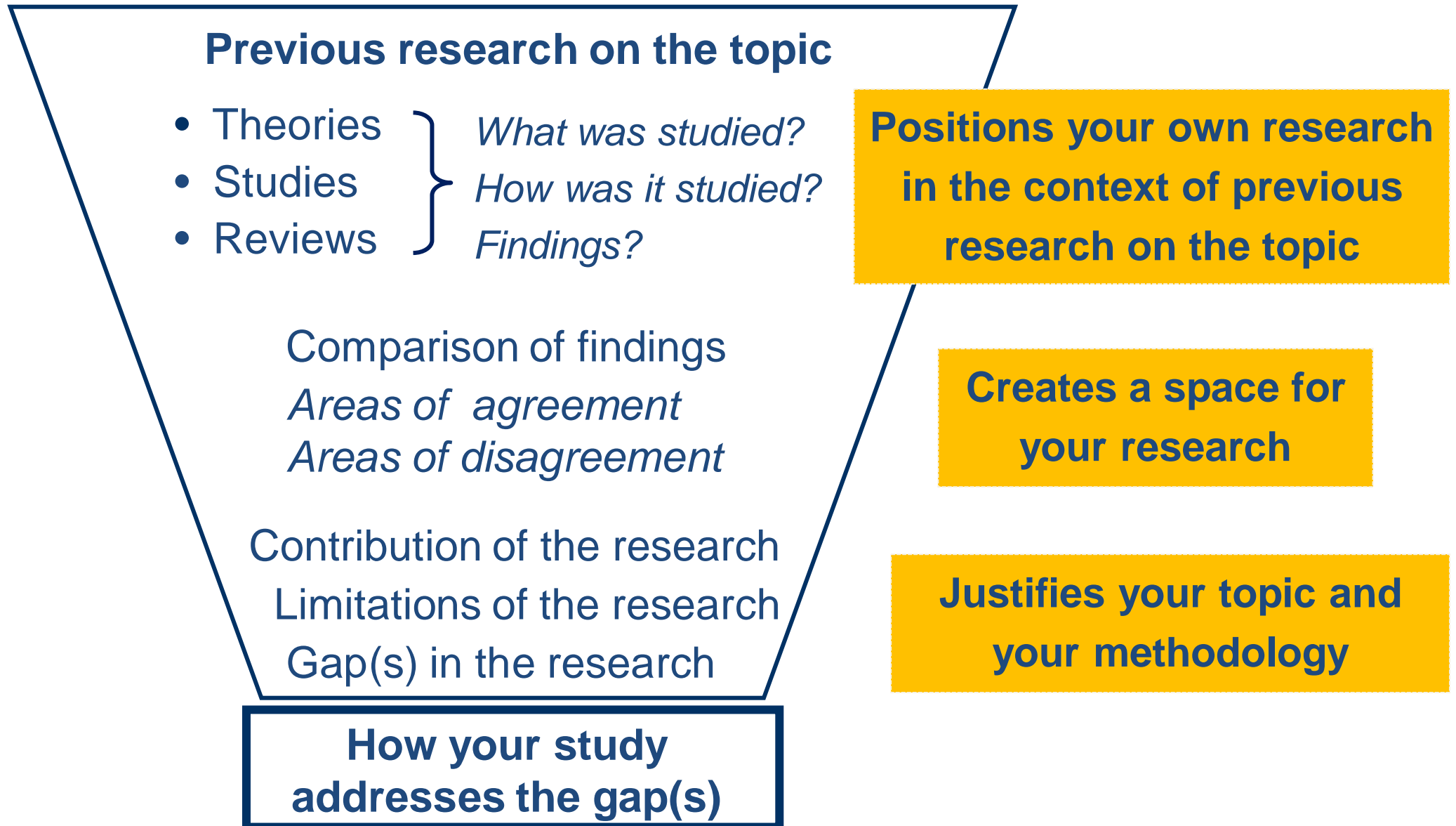
Critical overview of existing research  
in your specific topic area  
What do we already know from existing research?  
Which aspects require further research?  
- what are the gap(s) in the research?



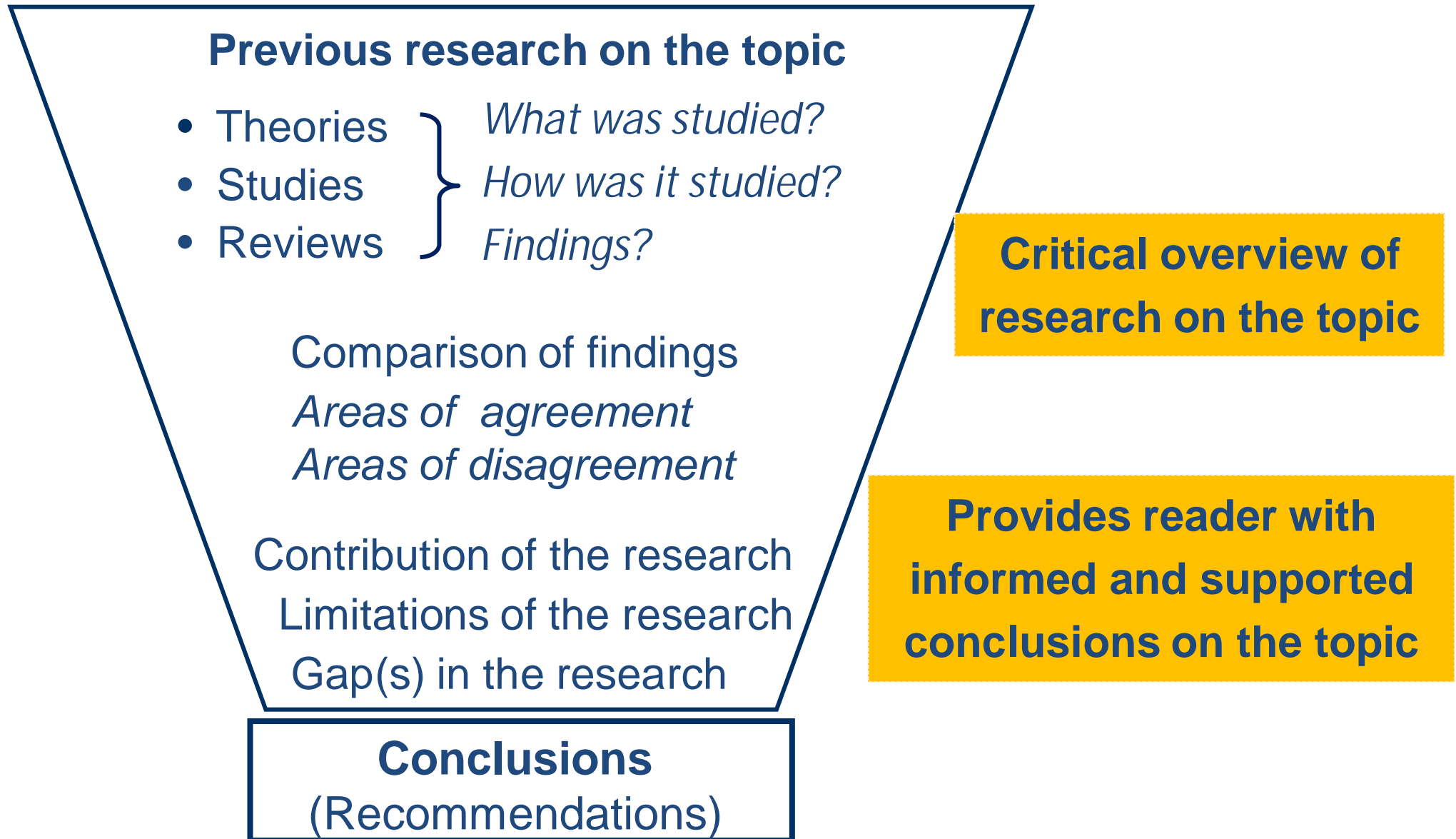
*Therefore*

How your study fills the research gap(s)  
Objectives of your research

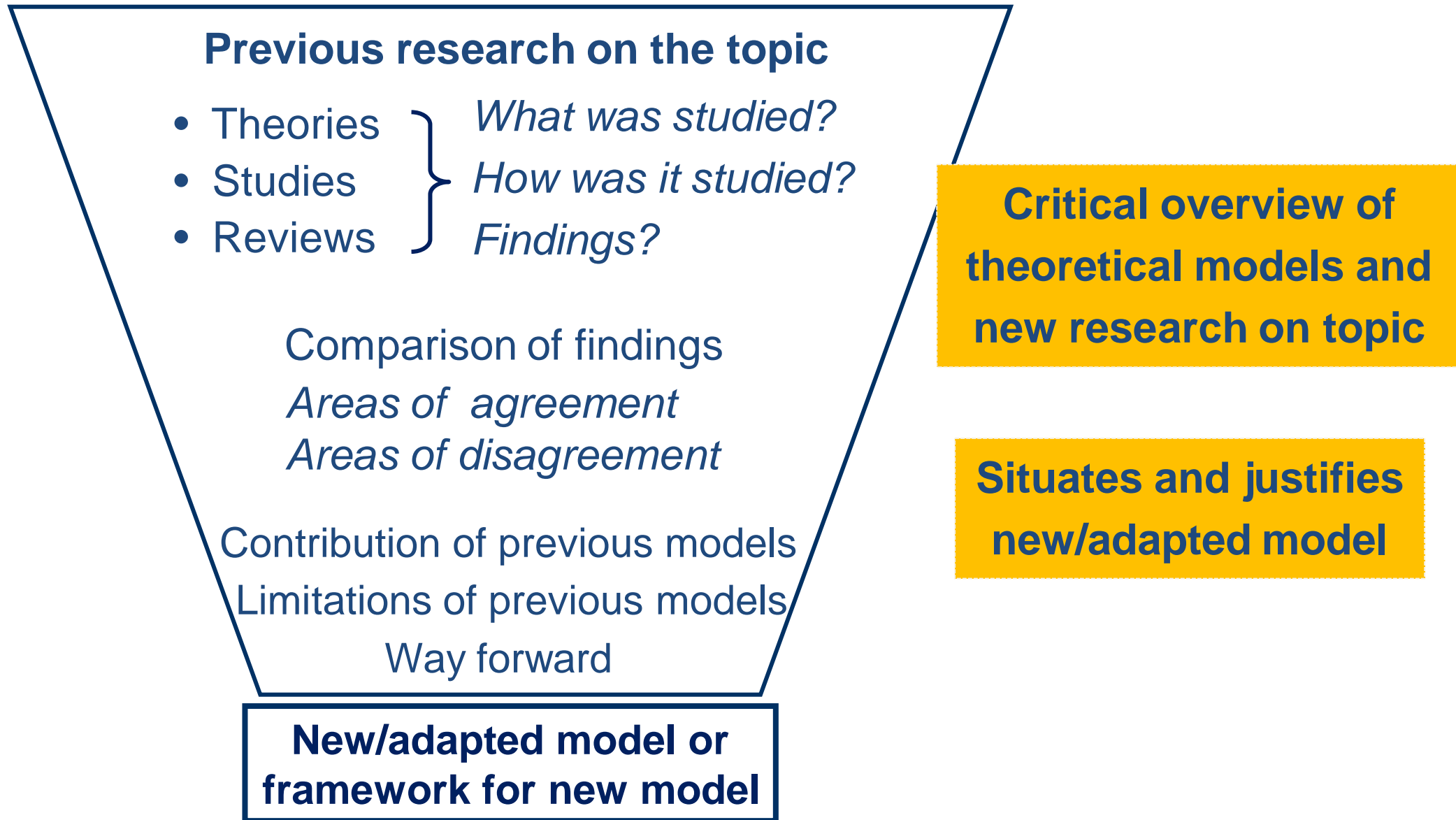
# ❑ Review leading to research question(s)



# ❑ Review leading to conclusions on topic



# ❑ Review leading to new/adapted theoretical model





# How is a literature review organised?

- by key themes or findings
- arranged in headings and sub-headings
- as an argument that *flows*
  - information from various sources is *synthesised* to form a coherent argument

# Organised by key themes or findings

Topic: What are the most effective measures to prevent smoking onset amongst adolescents?

## *Restrictions on tobacco advertising*

Tobacco advertising and smoking initiation

Effectiveness of banning advertising

Alternative forms of tobacco promotion

## *Restrictions on sales to adolescents*

Age limits

Restricting sales to tobacconists only

## *Product regulation*

Labelling

Ban on small packaging

## *Health education*

Mass-media campaigns targeted at youth

Smoking prevention programmes in schools

Themes/issues that  
emerge in the literature

Set out under headings  
and sub-headings

# Synthesise information on existing research

A literature review is not just a collection of summaries:

**Research by Brown (2002)**

**Research by Smith (2005)**

**Research by Atken (2007)**

## *Synthesise information on existing research on the topic*

→ *Where is your voice here?* What is the point you're making about the topic in this paragraph? Which issue does the research highlight?

Research by Brown (2002)

→ *Where is your voice here?* What is the relationship between Brown's research and Smith's research?

Research by Smith (2005)

→ *Where is your voice here?* What is the relationship between Atken's research and that of Brown and of Smith?

Research by Atken (2007)

How are all these linked to your research question?

# Synthesise existing research on topic

Correlates of Burnout

***Introduce information before going into detail***

Correlates of burnout can be grouped into three major categories: individual (or personal), job, and organisational...

*Individual Level Correlates*

***Your voice must guide the discussion***

Demographic variables (such as gender and age) represent examples of variables studied at the individual level. Gender has been frequently investigated as a correlate of burnout, although findings for this variable are varied. Although there are some studies showing that burnout occurs more often among women than among men (Bussing & Perrar, 1991; Maslach & Jackson, 1998b; Poulin & Walter, 1993a), the opposite is also found (Price & Spence, 1994; Van Horn et al., 1997)...

Age is the most consistent factor related to burnout (Birch et al., 1986; Mor & Laliberte, 1984; Poulin & Walter, 1993a)...

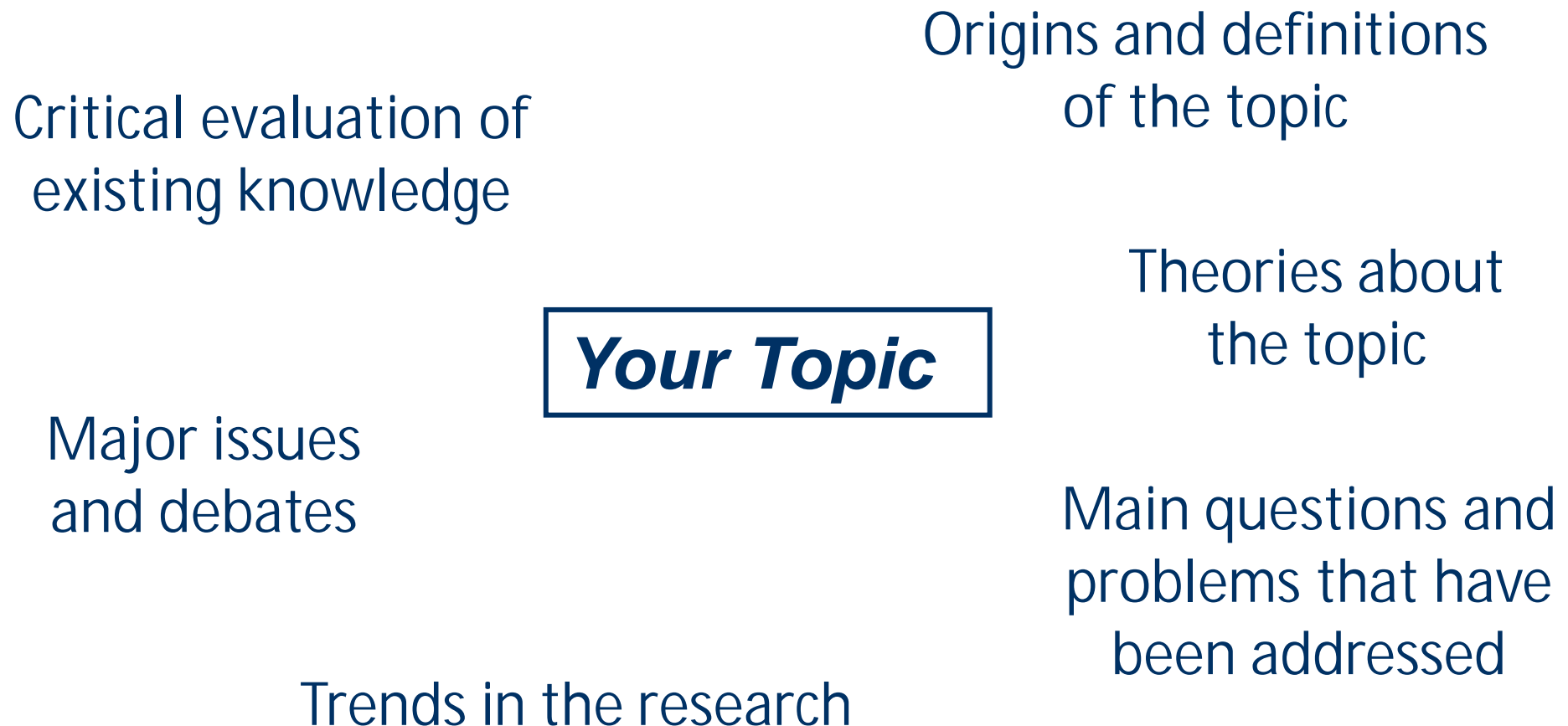
# Critiquing existing research on the topic

*What are the strengths and limitations of the existing research in relation to your topic?*

- Contributions to the topic area
- Limitations in terms of the topic area
- What are the gaps in the research?

*You're constructing **an argument** about previous research on the topic*

# Existing knowledge on your topic: What do you include?



# Teacher Burnout: A Study of Occupational Stress and Burnout in New Zealand Schools

- 2.1. The Nature of Stress
- 2.2. History of the Stress Concept
- 2.3. Main Approaches to Definitions of Stress
- 2.4. The Stimulus Based Definition
- 2.5. The Response Based Definition
- 2.6. Summary of Response and Stimulus Approaches
- 2.7. The Transactional or Interactional Definition of Stress
- 2.8. The Burnout Concept
- 2.9. Defining Burnout
- 2.10. Cherniss's Model of Burnout
- 2.11. Golebiewski's Model of Burnout
- 2.12. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory
- 2.13. Conceptual Framework
- 2.14. Measurement of Burnout
- 2.15. Correlates of Burnout
- 2.16. Studies on Teacher Stress and Burnout
- 2.17. Conclusion



**Stress**

**Burnout**

**Stress and Burnout**



# Origins and definitions of the topic

## Example:

In order to study stress in teachers, a clear understanding of what is meant by the term 'stress' is needed...The word stress has become a word commonly used in a variety of settings, with different meanings attached to the situation in which it is used. Selye (1956), one of the pioneers in the field...

Introduce  
seminal texts

There are, however, three general perspectives which have been identified. One is that stress is the result of something outside of the individual, i.e., external factors are the cause of stress the second is that stress is internal, it is what goes on inside the individual as they interpret or react to what is going on around them (Gold & Roth, 1993); and the third major perspective is the transactional view of Lazarus and colleagues which focuses on the cognitive processes and emotional reactions of individuals to stress in their environment (Lazarus, 1978)

Provide  
overview  
of  
definitions

# Origins and definitions of the topic

Phrases for  
introducing  
definitions

One of the most publicised definitions (Maslach, 1986), is that burnout is generally conceived to be a chronic response to extreme pressures and involves emotional exhaustion, feelings of low accomplishment and a depersonalisation of others in the work context – a tendency to treat them as objects rather than people...

Compare  
definitions

A recent definition... Another distinct definition, by Freudenberger and Richelson (1980), describes burnout in terms of chronic fatigue, depression and frustration typically engendered by commitment to undertaking that did not realise the person's ambitions and expected rewards. Although this conceptualisation incorporates some of the elements of burnout, it is problematical because as O'Driscoll (2000) states, it confounds burnout with variables which are normally considered as distinct from, although related to, burnout, especially depression and chronic fatigue....

Critique  
definitions

Critique from  
academic  
source

# Introducing theoretical models

Use original  
sources

Summarise the  
information on  
models using your  
own words

Use appropriate  
signal words

Use sources for  
overview &  
critique

...Maslach and Jackson (1981) conceptualised burnout as<sup>1</sup> having three core components: emotional<sup>2</sup> exhaustion, depersonalisation<sup>3</sup> and lack of, or reduced, personal accomplishment. Maslach's model of burnout characterises *emotional exhaustion* as feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Maslach (1998) cites major sources of this exhaustion as work overload and personal conflict at work... *Depersonalisation* refers to a negative, cynical or excessively detached response to other people, which often includes a loss of idealism... *Reduced personal accomplishment* refers to a decline in feelings of competence and productivity at work...

The above three-component conceptualisation is the most widely accepted model of burnout (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1996)...

# Critical evaluation of theoretical models

Topic sentence  
linking paragraph to  
last section &  
introducing new  
point

Connecting words  
and phrases to  
guide readers

Despite the popularity of the stimulus approach, the stimulus model is not without its limitations. One is that stimulus events alone may be insufficient when predicting an individual's response. For example, two teachers subjected to loud, noisy classrooms may show quite different levels of strain, or may show strain at different times. Thus it fails to take account of individual differences, and it ignores the perceptual cognitive processes which underpin such differences (Cox & Fergusson, 1991).

Another criticism of this approach is that...

# Trends in the research

Indication of  
time period

Vocabulary used  
to indicate trends

**In the last few decades, research on stress has broadened and become influenced largely by behavioural scientists, moving away from the strict focus on physical stimuli and their physiological consequences (Travers & Cooper, 1996). There has also been a shift of orientation from physical stressors, such as mechanical trauma, toward psychological stressors such as role ambiguity and the impact of psychological and social influences upon the individual...**

(Whitehead, 2001, p. 15)

## Critical evaluation of existing knowledge on topic

Despite the abundance of definitions and theories of burnout, there is still lacking a comprehensive theoretical framework for burnout, due to the complexity of the phenomenon (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998)...

The amount of qualitative research on teacher's work stress is limited. Two studies by Blase (1986) and Ianni and Reuss- Ainni (1978) will be discussed below...

- Identify strengths & limitations in relation to your research
- You are constructing an argument about gaps in current knowledge
  - your voice must come through clearly in the review

## Identify gaps in the research

### *Using negative openings:*

However, little information

little data

little research

However, few studies

few researchers

few attempts

### *Using contrastive statements:*

The research has tended to focus on..., rather than on...

However, much of the attention has been focused on X rather than Y.

### *Raising questions, hypotheses or needs*

If these results could be confirmed, they would provide strong evidence for...

It would seem, therefore, that further investigations are needed in order to...

See Manchester University's [Academic Phrasebank](#) (2006) for more examples:  
Google: manchester university + academic phrasebank

## Summarise findings on existing research

From this overview of teacher stress and burnout, some important considerations emerge. Firstly, findings from biographical/demographic characteristics in relation to stress and burnout are not conclusive. Also, the review provides predominantly quantitative, empirically based studies, with very few findings coming from interpretive or narrative study. Apart from Friedman's (1991), Blase's (1996) and Ianni and Reuss-Ianni's (1978) study, there has been limited research using qualitative methods encouraging free expression of teacher's personal meanings associated with work stress and burnout.

*Leading to concluding statements  
indicating need for present study*

While studies list factors that contribute to stress and burnout, it is clear that *understanding* the complexity of burnout in schools is required to give deeper insight into the problem.



# Deciding which literature is most pertinent to your review

## **Library searching - Electronic and hard copies:**

- university databases
- use abstracts to help you in your search
- which authors and articles/books are cited most?
- make an appointment with a librarian for a research consultation

*Make sure you follow guidelines in  
Course Guides for requirements*

# Prioritise material type

## *Peer reviewed*

1. Articles in refereed, international journals
2. Books / Chapters in Ed. Books
3. Articles in national, refereed journals
4. Conference papers / Research reports (govt, com, org)
5. PhD thesis
6. MA thesis
7. Honours thesis
8. Websites / Articles in non-refereed journals

- Check course requirements
- Consult with your supervisor

# Presenting information and analysis

A range of formats can be used:

- Text
- Tables
- Diagrams

- Consult with your supervisor on appropriate formats
- See Emerson & Hampton, Chapter 9
- Examine other literature reviews
- Create templates according to the requirements of your course
  - presentation and referencing of texts, tables and diagrams
  - in-text references to texts, tables and diagrams

# Help with literature review

- One-to-one & small group consultations at CLS:  
Contact details: <https://learning.massey.ac.nz>
- Massey's [OWLL](#) site
- Recommended text on literature review (available in the Library):  
Hart, C. (1998). *Doing a literature review*. Sage Publications.
- Recommended for students in the sciences (available in the Library):  
Cargill, M., & O'Connor, P. (2009). *Writing scientific research articles*. Wiley-Blackwell.



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