This presentation overviews the basics of writing a literature review. This presentation has been designed for those carrying out research where they are required to write-up as part of their research a chapter, which reviews the literature. It begins by focusing on the actual purpose for writing a literature review, including an explicit definition of what the concept means. Three examples are provided from different research projects demonstrating how to organise the literature using different strategies. The talk then moves into specific details to include in relation to a study. A final section focuses on ways of critiquing research, which is an important component of writing a literature review.
Literature reviews can be one of the most difficult writing tasks. There may be a sense of mystery surrounding what exactly is a literature review. Hence, pinning down the purpose is key.

Four purposes of a literature review

1. Helps map and define research topic:
   - highlights scope & boundaries,
   - shows where the study fits into the broad picture,
   - shares with reader studies closely resembling proposed study,
   - provides evidence that your topic is building onto an established body of knowledge.

2. Presents a balanced view of the area you are interested in.

3. Justifies and makes a case for your research question, problem, issue:
   - provides a framework for establishing the importance of your study;
   - argues that not enough is yet known about the topic.

4. Provides literature for you to compare your findings with at the end

A literature review builds on, but is neither, an annotated bibliography nor an historical overview.
A common error made when writing a literature review is to

- A) Provide a comprehensive description and evaluation of the literature
- B) Report on events that have happened in the past that lead up to your research topic or question
- C) Provide a critique of the literature to justify your research area.
- D) Open a bottle of wine

So far this is not a common error, however you may feel like engaging in this activity once your literature review is completed.

Your answer:

You did not answer this question completely.

Submit  Clear
The purpose of this diagram is to highlight the importance of being selective in your review. It is impossible to cover every study that has ever existed on your topic. Moreover, it is impossible to cover every study in detail within your review. Hence, one of the key characteristics of writing a review is to ensure that you highlight 'in bright lights' (signalled metaphorically by the red line) the studies that are most relevant in building towards your research rationale. Certainly, you can mention the other studies, but in less detail, perhaps to indicate their distance away from the core of the research topic.
Difference between a review and an essay

Smyth (2004, pp. 113-114) defines a literature review:

- Although conceptually similar to an essay, a literature review differs in that it is written to address some specific research problem or question. It does not present a thesis. Rather, a literature review should reach some conclusion on the current state of knowledge in an area, and suggest the next step in the investigation of the problem or question of interest. The conclusion reached is not final in the same sense as is a thesis. Moreover, because of its nature, a literature review will be largely based on research findings.

At a very basic, rudimentary level, it can be helpful to conceptualise a literature review as a discussion of the research area on a particular topic that is arranged by key themes or findings, which lead up to or link in with your question.
Social science example – title

The purpose of these concentric circles is to demonstrate diagramatically the development of a literature review in conjunction with supporting a research area. One of the difficulties with creating your review, as a task preceding the research, is that there is no or very little research explicitly exploring your area of interest, hence the reason for your research inquiry. Consequently, you are often left with the studies around the periphery of your topic.

In the case of the topic in the diagram, it was interdisciplinary and so the studies of interest were located at the margins of the disciplines and sub-disciplines. In fact, there was not always research available within these margins and so there was a need to find the next closest study of relevance to the research area. The space where the three concentric circles all overlap was the location of the research to be carried out. Any research remotely linked to this area, involving connections across all three disciplines (CMC, social psychology, and disability studies) became integral to the literature review.
## Toing and froing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential empowering outcomes for people with disabilities (pro)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom and autonomy (pro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequity and prejudice remain (anti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accentuating bodily forms (anti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining the status quo (anti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstituting bodily constraints (anti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging oppressions (pro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprecedented possibilities for reconstructing norms of identity (pro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical practices languish (anti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing social contact (anti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating further dependency for people with disabilities (anti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective empowerment for disabled identities (pro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webs of power (anti)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lit review provided the resources for critical reflection on whether there were empowering and disempowering online experiences available to people with disabilities. Justified exploring their online experiences.

Cont.

The list of headings formed the section titles within the literature review. One way of creating a sense of comparison and evaluation of the ideas and findings within the literature was to vary the order of arguments ‘for’ (pro) and ‘against’ (anti) the topic, namely, the value of being online for people with disabilities. This leads to a constant ‘toing’ and ‘froing’ between evidence.
“Antibiotics are used to cure diseases in pigs and increase performance. Their use, however, has come under attack by consumers and political groups due to allergies and bacterial resistance in pork consumers. Since antibiotics increase performance, the ban [on antibiotics] would increase mortality and reduce performance in pigs. To avoid a decrease in performance, there is a need to develop natural treatments to replace antibiotic use” (Nkamba, 2006).

1. Antibiotic use in curing pig diseases
   • Studies supporting this
   • Increases pig’s performance – growth rate

However, concerns raised by consumers and political groups have drawn attention to the problems of antibiotic use.

Science example – title

Here is another example of the development of a literature review. However, this example is from the sciences, namely veterinary science and food, nutrition, and human health. This example comes from a student, Richard Nkamba, whose research focused on developing natural treatments to replace antibiotic use in pig farming. The quoted paragraph from his draft literature review chapter summarises the development and rationale for his research topic. Consequently, it functions as a summary of the areas that need to be covered in the literature review. These areas are numbered from 1-4.
2. Health problems with antibiotic use
   • Health - allergies, bacterial resistance in pork consumers
   • Political concerns
   • Banning antibiotics

3. Consequences of banning antibiotics
   • Mortality increase, reduced pig performance, growth rate

4. Developing natural treatments to replace antibiotics
   • Different treatments
     • Benefits
     • Disadvantages
     • End with closest resembling treatment to your study and/or technique used in your study

All this justifies the validity & value of your research question.
Business example

Do Management Consultants Create Knowledge?

Research conducted by Elisa Peirano Vejo, Management department, 2005. Her topic occurred in opposition to criticism of consultants for not creating substantive ideas, and their lack of measurement and evaluation of management developments.

Vejo’s diagram of the literature review

Vejo used grounded theory methodology
Data collected from interviews with management consultants.
• Issues
  – Academics vs practitioners
  – Management consultants already part of media industry – distributing knowledge business.
  – What is knowledge? – Foucault
  – How does knowledge become science?

Business Studies example

Interdisciplinary area spanning management theory, philosophy and science. The hyperlink will take you to a mind map/flow chart representation of the literature covered in the review and how sense was made out of different groups of literature.
Managers (Faust, 2002; Kieser, 2002) 1., 2., 3. (Kipping & Engwall, 2002)

Difficulty to measure results

Politics (Alvesson & Johansson, 2002)

CONSULTING PROJECT

Affected by National Context (Wood, 2002):
- France (Henry, 2002*)
- Sweden (Engwall, Furusten & Wallersted, 2002*)
- The Netherlands (Karsten & Van Keen, 2002*)
- Finland (Ainamo & Tienari, 2002*)
- Italy
- Australia (Wright, 2002)

Knowledge (Faust, 2002; Legge, 2002; Armbruster & Kipping, 2002)

'Otherness' (Kipping & Armbruster, 2002)

Application (Gammelsaeter, 2002)

CONSULTING INDUSTRY

Professionalism (Ruef, 2002)

CONSULTING FIRM Expansion & Growth (Ernst & Keiser, 2002)

History & Development (Kipping, 2002b)

Low Barriers of Entry

Media Press, Academia, (*1; Kieser, 2002)

Academia, (*1; Kieser, 2002)

Management Gurus (Clark & Greatbatch, 2002, 2002b; Jackson, 2002)

Experience (Werr, 2002)

Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002)

Fashion (Abrahamson, 1996; Kieser, 2002)

Rhetoric (Case, 2002; Fincham, 2002)

Technology (Bloomfield et al., 2002)
Initial organisation

1. Use EndNote

2. After reading a handful of research papers, consider keywords that may be used to categorise the work under.
   • Gender
   • Ethnicity
   • Social factors
   • Biological factors

3. Use these as headings to group summaries of research papers.

4. Try to suspend the need for absolute conclusion, completeness, and finality.
Building your story

- Identify areas of consensus: Hence, it seems that there is agreement among researchers of the 80s regarding Thomson’s theory.

- Identify areas of divergence: Much debate exists on the issue of... Try to explain why.

- Consider the need for summary paragraphs dispersed throughout the review.

  In summary, the evidence laid out demonstrates that operating online does not challenge the online medium’s ability to... Rather, this literature supports a continuation of... Consequently, people with disabilities may experience social stigma online... However, alternative ideas and findings suggest...
A study by Smith (1998) showed that gender differences exist online.

How?
Why?

Smith (1998) investigated the existence of gender differences in chatroom participation. By measuring the proportion of responses made by male and female participants, taking into account the amount of time spent accessing the chatroom, findings showed that males were more likely than females to post messages (67% and 33% respectively). This evidence supports the view...

Try to explain the logic behind what the study found, rather than simply stating what they found.

Try to be specific when explaining findings
### Specific details

**Features to include**
- Participants’ characteristics, criteria for inclusion
- Sample size
- Location of study
- Type of study – expt, interviews, survey
- Nature of task – what was done, details of tests used
- Findings – numerical, descriptive
- How the findings relate to your research question

**Summarising**
Based on the findings of Brown (1989) and Jones (1997), Smith (1998) hypothesised that gender differences are prevalent online.

Cont.
You need these details to convince the reader of the validity of the assertion that the study has made an accurate conclusion or demonstration. Obviously, the amount of detail included will depend on the importance of the work to your research and whether it is likely to be accepted on face value as valid evidence.

At times, you will need to summarise outcomes/predictions, etc. It is reasonable to need to rely on the findings of others to justify the predictions of other investigations.
Being selective

1. Cover seminal work, leading theories, concepts in the area
   For theories, try to refer to the original research, rather than a textbook reference. *Einstein’s (1923) theory of relativity…*

2. Multiple authors
   Use when your assertion is particularly important, or may be questioned.

   *A plethora of literature exists about men and women masquerading as the opposite gender online (Curtis, 1997; Dickel, 1995; Kendall, 1996; McRae, 1996, 1997; Reid, 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Turkle, 1995; Van Gelder, 1991; Whitty, 2002).*

3. Discernment in use of verbs
   Just because an author suggests an idea, this does not make it so.

   *Smith (1998) suggests that gender differences exist online.*

   **Suggest** is not the same as **demonstrate, conclude, argue…**

As long as you have mentioned Brown and Jones’ work to demonstrate the link in reasoning.

Think about the verb forms you are using and their impact on your review of the literature.
Avoiding repetition

Smyth (2004) highlights the importance of referring to authors in different ways: their ‘name’, ‘pronouns’, ‘investigators’, ‘researchers’…

Brown (1999) conducted a study on gender differences. She demonstrated how… . Brown concluded that…/It was concluded that…Similarly, another researcher looked at…

Similarly, instead of relying on the word ‘research’, also use ‘investigation’, ‘study’, ‘project’, ‘work’…

Use their ‘name’, ‘pronouns’, ‘investigators’, ‘researchers’…
Beginning your critique

- Is the author knowledgeable in the area?
- Objective and balanced discussion
- Recent publications are up-to-date, although may omit older material which is still relevant.
- Journal articles typically have more up-to-date info because less time taken to publish, compared to books published at the same time.
- Not all conference proceedings exercise peer-review. If the info is valuable, it may be published as a journal article.

Evaluating sources used in your review.
You can be critical at the very level of which works you choose to cover
Is the author knowledgeable in the area? – Have they published other articles on the topic, are they cited frequently in the literature?
Objective and balanced discussion - govt reports may be influenced by political agendas, favouring public attitudes.
Being critical of outcomes, explanations...

- Be cautious of claims made based on cited sources or authors who only mention others’ findings and suggestions. 
  Based on the findings of Brown (1989) and Jones (1997), Smith (1998) concludes that gender differences are prevalent online. 
  The earth is the centre of the universe (Brown, 1974, as cited in McDonald, 1975).

- Inconsistencies with a vast number of other sources.

- Broad, generalisable statements, which are unsubstantiated.

- Omission of counter evidence you are aware of through your review.

- Omission of alternative explanations for findings.

Cont. - Title
To assess Brown (1989) and Jones’ (1997) claims accurately, you need to evaluate Brown and Jones work.
Methodological critique

- Sample size
- Randomized trials
- Reliable control – confounding variables
- Validity

Lack of alternative methodologies used to understand the issue.
Other strategies

• Identify gaps in knowledge that relate to your research question.
  – *Lack of New Zealand context*

• Identify strengths, advantages.

• Draw on others’ critiques of the literature.
• Don’t let the literature control you!
• Your story
• Ensure that the information you provide backs up your research question (and approach).
• Suspend the need for finality.

– it is impossible to cover the entirety of literature on your topic.
– you need to highlight the important steps that have led to the development of your work (picture yourself as a tour guide).

Suspend the need for finality at each stage of developing your literature review.
References

For more information...

- Please email the [Student Learning Centre](mailto:), Palmerston North campus.