



Doing a literature review: video tutorial

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Transcript

Introduction: Welcome to this screencast on doing a literature review brought to you by Reading University's Study Advice team. It is designed for you to go through at your own time and you can pause it at any time.

Most dissertations and projects will ask for a literature review section but what is one and why do you need it?

The purpose: It is important to remember that your research, or indeed any research, does not operate within a vacuum but instead build on previous findings in your field. A literature review therefore, states what the current state of research is in your chosen field and how your research fits in to this. It also provides evidence that you may need later on in your dissertation to help explain your findings and generate discussion.

Take a critical view: Doing a review therefore, requires more than just finding the relevant information but requires you to take a critical view. This will allow you to create an argument that leads to the exposure of a research problem. In many ways creating a literature review is similar to doing a jigsaw puzzle. When critically evaluating the research you will need to consider how all the pieces of the puzzle fit together to present the bigger picture and identify any missing gaps and therefore determining how your research fits in.

A 5 step plan: To create a literature review for your topic, follow this 5 step plan:

Step 1 Define the problem. You need to firstly define the topic of your study and then consider the sub topics within it that you would like to explore. For instance, I might be interested in the impact that giving reward stickers has on children's performance. I may then wish to look for literature on: rewards and how it links to performance; theories on how children are motivated; and look for definitions of performance and how it is measured. Thinking through these concepts will help you with the next stage

Step 2 Find the research and read critically. You are now ready to start the research. Using the definitions of the problem that you have identified, you could start your search by looking at the library catalogue using some of these key words. Once you have a number of articles, you need to be able to derive from them the information that you need for your literature review. Consider what their key findings are and whether the evidence it offers confirms your view or provides a counter argument. It's important at this stage that you take clear and effective notes. Carefully note the reference and page numbers, as you will need to refer back to these later

Step 3 Organise and theme. A literature review is not simply a list of all the research you have found but is written in themes. Hopefully, you will have spotted a number of themes as you have been reading and taking notes from your research. These themes can provide headings within your review. In my original example I may for instance notice these emerging themes through my reading. You will need to be able to be selective here and discount some articles that don't fit into your major themes.

Step 4 Structure. Now you have your main themes for your literature review you will need to decide on your structure. One way to approach this would be to start with the broader themes and move to those that overlap more closely with your study - hence providing evidence for the need for your research.

Step 5 Write up. As with all good writing you need a structure to your literature review. This will include an introduction, main body and conclusion. Your introduction should explain the broad context of your research area, the main topics that you have chosen to investigate and an idea of how you have structured your review.

The main body: Following from point 4 this would be an analysis of the literature theme by theme showing how your research builds from what has come before. As mentioned, you might like to start on broader themes moving through to those most directly related to your study.

And finally your conclusion should summarise the state of research in your field, identify any gaps in knowledge and show how your investigation is going to address these gaps.

Final tips: So in summary, keep in mind the purpose of the literature review when researching and follow the 5 step plan to create a successful literature review by analysing and theming your research and writing it up in a structured, organised way.