

Tackling a Literature Review

Louise Baron BSc, PhD, FGS

A Literature Review is...

- ...an organised, critical appraisal of published attempts to answer a question
- ...NOT MERELY A DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE!

Therefore we have to start by knowing and understanding the question!



Understanding the Purpose

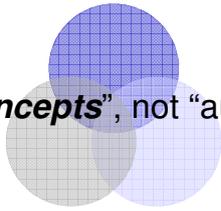
- What do we know?
- What don't we know?
- What has been tried?
- Did it work?
- What has been argued?
- What is left to be done?
- What do I intend to do?
- Just how important is all this anyway?

The Foundation

- The Research Question
- Scope of the review
- Organisation of the review
 - Chronological
 - Thematic (models; results etc.)
 - Methodological

The key to getting it right...

Think “**concepts**”, not “authors”!



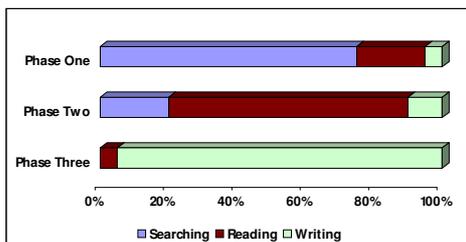
Group Exercise

- Devise a research question
- Talk about how you might organise the review:
 - Chronological
 - Thematic
 - Methodological

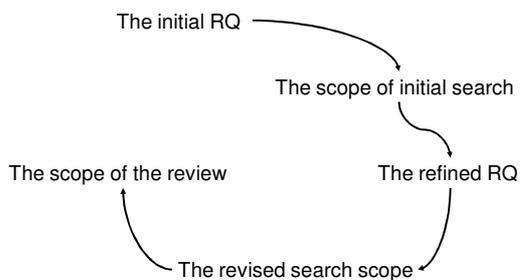
How your review will be judged...

- Did you find all the relevant literature?
- Have you organised your review appropriately?
- Have you understood what you have read?
- Have you written a *critical appraisal* of the material?
- Have you identified, defined and justified the research you intend to do?

The Phases



Focussing!



Starting the Search...

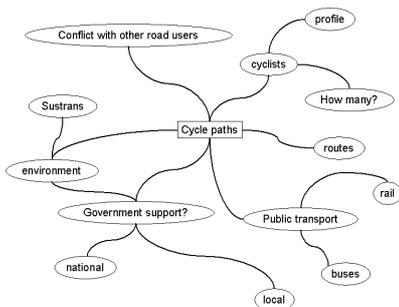
- Seminal texts
- Citation reports
- Specialist magazines
- Conference abstracts
- Internet
- Personal communication

The Search: Resources

- Abstracting journals
- CD-ROMs and other electronic databases
- Index to Theses etc
- "Web of Knowledge"
 - Journal Citation Reports
- Internet
- People!



Information Mapping



Group Exercise

Draw an information map for the research question you devised earlier

Types of Source Documents

- Refereed journal articles
- Texts
- Specialist magazines
- Web-based documents
- Conference papers

Group Exercise:
List the strengths and weaknesses of these types of source for someone preparing a literature review.

How relevant is this?

- Date
- Abstract & Keywords
- Table of Contents
- Index
- Illustrations

Plus:

- Reviews
- Advice

Developing the Data

1. Reading With a Purpose
2. Note Taking

Getting stuck in...

- Read abstract or introduction (scope of document; approach taken; stance; methodologies)
- Read conclusions
- Decide what parts to read in depth

Reading and Note-taking

- The right time and place
- Read with a defined purpose



Reading with a Purpose

- Questions:
 - Currency?
 - Credibility?
 - Relevance?
 - Stance, approach, methods: compared with other workers?
 - Evidential support?
 - Were the methods appropriate?
 - Were the conclusions well-argued?
 - Has the author shown balance?

Talk about...

...some other possible questions you could add to the list to help build up material for a critical appraisal of the literature.

Information Management

- You will need somewhere to put it!
- You will need to retrieve your information efficiently
- Specialist programs
- Backing up

Using a Matrix

State of the Art: Fatigue, Sleepiness and Medical Errors
Literature Review

| Authors | Date | Purpose | Variables Ind / Dep | Subjects | Data | Comments/outcomes/ implications |
|---|---------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| Schell, Bass, Amato, Hoyano, Lutzema "Daytime sleepiness and habits and occupational accidents among hospital doctors" | March 2005 | A study to determine the influence of excessive daytime sleepiness and fatigue on the occurrence of medical errors | Relationship between occupational accidents and excessive daytime sleepiness | Cross-sectional study of 4,487 nurses working in 81 large hospitals in Spain. 94.0% response rate. 4,279 female nursing staff | Data was collected in 2003 By the use of an anonymous close- ended questionnaire | Statistical significance relationships were observed between experience of occupational accidents and the prevalence of excessive day time sleepiness. Association on drug administration errors, incorrect operation of medical equipment, and needle stick injuries. |

Writing the Literature Review

- Decide on organisation
 - Chronological?
 - Thematic?
 - Methodological?
- Write your Outline

Correct citation

- The default - it belongs to someone!
- Is that someone – me?!
- The “trail” needs to be evident

Be Prepared...

...to justify including any uncited

- Facts
- Methods
- Opinions
- Arguments
- Hypotheses
- Results
- Observations

Possible justifications

- I discovered the facts myself
- These are my original thoughts
- It's "common knowledge"

Practical tips...

- Paraphrase with the book closed - and don't forget to cite anyway
- Enclose all quotes or near-quotes in your notes
- Get your work reviewed
- When in doubt - seek advice!

Citation

- Find out the system required
- Check out its detailed standards
- Use specialist software if possible

The Outline

- Introduction
 - The research question and why it's important
 - Summary of previous attempts to answer it
- Body of the review
 - Headings according to your chosen method of organisation
- Conclusions
 - Where are the gaps?
 - Are they worth filling?
 - Who has made the best attempts to fill them?
 - How I intend to fill them

Writing Techniques

- Use the Outline for planning the task
- Rough drafting first!
- Writing order?

The Writing Process

- Focus on the purpose
- Remember what is required
- Build the document:

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Framework | Filling |
| Outline & headings | Words & pictures |

Statements of Intent

Here I will introduce the “research question” and outline the three most important methodological approaches used so far.

Here I’m going to explain why I think Wylde and Lye’s research is important and why I think their approach is both original and pivotal.

Refine your Rough Drafts

- *Wait!*
- Check facts
- Spelling, grammar, style
- Recast/rewrite
- Have I fulfilled my “Statement of Intent”?
- Enough citations?

Now that you have finished...

- Final check in hardcopy
- Review
- Final print and check
- Celebrate a job well done!

Summing Up

- Remember why you are doing the literature review
- Search within the scope
- Read and take notes with a purpose
- Decide on your review's organisation
- Write the outline and fill it in!
