

The Literature Review

A Guide for Students of
Arts and Social Sciences

英语学术论文 文献综述写作

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Preface

英 语 学 术 论 文 文 献 综 述 写 作

This book is designed to be a practical study guide that complements the growing body of guidance on academic research paper writing, and in particular complements the specialized niche of texts on doing a literature review.

This book is predominantly intended for use by undergraduate or postgraduate students in Arts or Social Sciences doing their dissertation. It should also be of use to students in Arts or Social Sciences studying at PhD level, where it is more likely that a systematic approach to literature review could be appropriate.

As you progress through the book, you will move from the basic knowledge of literature review into its rhetorical functions, contents, strategies, styles and stances. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to literature review. It covers

the following topics: What is a literature review? When would you do a literature review? And what are the typical elements of a literature review? Chapter 2 focuses on the structure of a literature review that might help you to understand the cyclical nature of all the activities involved in the creation of a literature review. Chapter 3 identifies writer's stance in a literature review. Chapter 4 discusses the multiple purposes which are likely to be realized in a literature review. Chapter 5 explains different strategies of in-text citation and gives some suggestions on the ways to cite sources. Chapter 6 describes the definitions of integral citation and non-integral citation. To illustrate points, the chapter includes details of rhetorical functions of these two types of citation. In Chapter 7, examples from real texts are used to guide you through the basics of the rhetorical functions of citations. Finally, in Chapter 8, four common referencing styles and basic principles when using referencing styles are presented.

If you are a beginner setting out on improving your review skills, work your way through the text to Chapters 1, 2, 6 and 8. If your goal is to undertake a systematic review, you would benefit from reading all the chapters.

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Unit 1

The Literature Review

Unit objectives

At the end of the unit you will

- ▶ understand the importance of a literature review in academic writing;
- ▶ know where a literature review fits within the context of research;
- ▶ identify the typical elements of a literature review.

Part I Pre-class Exploration



Group Work

Check your literature review knowledge by commenting on the following statements.

- a. The preparation of a literature review is a three-step process: finding the relevant literature, reading, and then writing up the review.

- b. Your literature review should be as long as possible to persuade your reader that you have read very widely.
- c. You need to include all of the previous research that relates to your topic.
- d. You can safely ignore literature that is not directly related to your topic.
- e. Your literature review is important because it demonstrates that the findings, theories, or analysis that you will present are a contribution to a cumulative process.
- f. Your literature review needs to explain clearly which potential areas for inclusion have not been covered in the review and why they have been omitted.
- g. Your literature review should discuss problems and/or controversies within your field.
- h. Your literature review should be presented in chronological order.
- i. Your literature review can help you discover conceptual traditions and frameworks used to examine problems.
- j. Your literature review should focus on very recent publications because they are likely the most relevant.
- k. Your literature review should help you reveal gaps in the existing body of research.
- l. In your literature review you should critically evaluate each piece of work included.

Part II Literature Review's Role in Research

1 What Is a Literature Review?

A literature review is a comprehensive overview of prior research regarding a specific topic. The overview shows the readers both what is known about a topic, and what is not yet known. Therefore, the actual study of a literature review seeks to set up the rationale or need for a new investigation.

A literature review is a systematic, explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners.

—Fink (2005)

The literature review is where you identify the theories and previous research which have influenced your choice of research topic and the methodology you are choosing to adopt.

—Ridley (2012)

② What Are the Features and Functions of a Literature Review?

A literature review

- ◆ is not only a list of information on past research outcomes but also to build up “ongoing dialogue” together with a summary showing the trends of the research area;
- ◆ should make critical analysis of previous literature, presenting a coherent argument and “reference to studies that support the ongoing argument”;
- ◆ intends to discover problems and unsolved issues through critical analysis of previous studies, highlighting gaps this study will fill.

——O’Connell and Jin (2002)

The literature in a research study accomplishes several purposes:

- ◆ It shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported;
- ◆ It relates a study to the larger, ongoing dialog in the literature about a topic, filling in gaps and extending prior studies;
- ◆ It provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study;
- ◆ It prevents from duplicating what has been done already;
- ◆ It helps the writer to avoid flaws in previous studies.

——Hart (1998)

3 Why Is It Important?

- ◆ Authors of literature reviews are at risk for producing mind-numbering lists of citations and findings that resemble a phone book — impressive case, lots of numbers, but not much plot.

——Bem (1995)

- ◆ Systematic review is a search for the whole truth, rather than just one part of it, and is thus a “fundamentally scientific activity”.

——Mulrow (1995)

- ◆ A good research synthesis can generally give us the most reliable estimate of the effectiveness of a specific intervention, and it can identify gaps in our knowledge that require further research. It can also give us a sense of the strength of the available evidence and the quality of the studies, thereby indicating how much confidence practitioners, service users, managers, policymakers, and the popular media should have in the results.

——Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton (2012)

Follow-up Exercise I

1. Add the verbs given below to complete the reasons for writing a literature review.

evaluate

relate

enable

justify

discover

ensure

focus

demonstrate

- (1) To _____ your research question.
- (2) To _____ you work to previously published research.
- (3) To _____ the strengths and weaknesses of other published material.
- (4) To _____ whether there are any research possibilities that have been ignored by the research already undertaken by other authors.
- (5) To _____ that you avoid repeating work that has already been done.
- (6) To _____ your knowledge of your chosen area is up-to-date.
- (7) To _____ your arguments by referencing previous work.
- (8) To _____ the reader of your review to locate the original literature that you cite through clear referencing.

Part III Structure of a Literature Review

1. Standard Model of a Literature Review

In your literature review you should answer the following questions.

- △ *What is already known about your area of interest?*
- △ *What are the key concepts?*
- △ *What is the relationship between these key concepts?*

- △ *What are the existing theories?*
- △ *Are there any conflicting opinions from different authors?*
- △ *What views/ideas need to be (further) tested?*
- △ *Is the work of other authors biased or limited in any way?*

Table 1.1 Moves of a Literature Review

Moves	Steps
M1: Statement of Problem Issues	E1: Aims and objectives E2: Thesis statement E3: Research questions E4: Reference to findings E5: Background information E6: Introduction
M2: Findings Related to the Problem Issues	E1: Identification of gaps E2: Research questions E3: Argument and counter-argument
M3: Critical Analysis of Findings	E1: Argument and counter-argument
M4: Identification of Gaps	E1: Reference to previous literature E2: Recommendations E3: Synthesis
M5: Summation and Transition to the Next Section	E1: Reference to the next section E2: Future framework E3: Personal opinion E4: Recommendations E5: Hypothesis (optional) E6: Research questions (optional)

(O'Connell & Jin, 2002)

Follow-up Exercise II

1. Read the sample literature review and answer the questions as briefly as possible.

- (1) What is the topic of this research?
- (2) Whose work is cited in order to illustrate the topic?
- (3) What's the author's view on the literature?
- (4) In what way is this research different from the previous work?

Sample writing

Language and Gender: A Brief Literature Review

With the general growth of feminist work in many academic fields, it is hardly surprising that the relationship between language and gender has attracted considerable attention in recent years. In an attempt to go beyond “folklinguistic” assumptions about how men and women use language (the assumption that women are “talkative”, for example), studies have focused on anything from different syntactical, phonological or lexical uses of language to aspects of conversation analysis, such as topic nomination and control, interruptions and other interactional features. While some research has focused only on the description of differences, other work has sought to show how linguistic differences both reflect and reproduce social difference. Accordingly, Coates (1988) suggests that research on language and

gender can be divided into studies that focus on dominance and those that focus on difference.

Much of the earlier work emphasized dominance. Lakoff's (1975) pioneering work suggested that women's speech typically displayed a range of features, such as tag questions, which marked it as inferior and weak. Thus, she argued that the type of subordinate speech learned by a young girl "will later be an excuse others use to keep her in a demeaning position, to refuse to treat her seriously as a human being" (1975, p.5). While there are clearly some problems with Lakoff's work—her analysis was not based on empirical research, for example, and the automatic equation of subordinate with "weak" is problematic—the emphasis on dominance has understandably remained at the Centre of much of this work. Research has shown how men nominated topics more, interrupted more often, held the floor for longer, and so on (see, for example, Zimmerman and West, 1975). The chief focus of this approach, then, has been to show how patterns of interaction between men and women reflect the dominant position of men in society.

Some studies, however, have taken a different approach by looking not so much at power in mixed-sex interactions as at how same-sex groups produce certain types of interaction. In a typical study of this type, Maltz and Borker (1982) developed lists of what they described as

men's and women's features of language. They argued that these norms of interaction were acquired in same-sex groups rather than mixed-sex groups and that the issue is therefore one of (sub-)cultural miscommunication rather than social inequality. Much of this research has focused on comparisons between, for example, the competitive conversational style of men and the cooperative conversational style of women.

While some of the more popular work of this type, such as Tannen (1987), lacks a critical dimension, the emphasis on difference has nevertheless been valuable in fostering research into gender subgroup interactions and in emphasizing the need to see women's language use not only as "subordinate" but also as a significant subcultural domain.

Although Coates' (1988) distinction is clearly a useful one, it also seems evident that these two approaches are by no means mutually exclusive. While it is important on the one hand, therefore, not to operate with a simplistic version of power and to consider language and gender only in mixed-group dynamics, it is also important not to treat women's linguistic behaviour as if it existed outside social relations of power. As Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary (1988) ask, "Can it be coincidence that men are aggressive and hierarchically-organized conversationalists, whereas women are expected to provide conversational support?" (p.80) Clearly, there is scope here for a great

deal more research that

- ◆ is based on empirical data of men's and women's speech;
- ◆ operates with a complex understanding of power and gender relationships (so that women's silence, for example, can be seen both as a site of oppression and as a site of possible resistance);
- ◆ looks specifically at the contexts of language use, rather than assuming broad gendered differences;
- ◆ involves more work by men on language and gender, since attempts to understand male uses of language in terms of difference have been few (thus running the danger of constructing men's speech as the "norm" and women's speech as "different");
- ◆ aims not only to describe and explain but also to change language and social relationships.

(<http://www.caes.hku.hk/acadgrammar/litrev/examples/litex3.htm>)

2. Read and identify the moves of the literature review in the sample writing.

Part IV Language Focus

① Overview of the Subject, Issue or Theory

Present simple tense, past simple tense, and present perfect tense are often used in this part.

For example,

- a) Previous research efforts demonstrate that construction costs can be generated from 3D models.
- b) The main purpose of these studies was to rationalize why sellers vary their prices even when demand and supply conditions are stable.
- c) The study of knowledge labor and the information society has raised numerous important questions for academics and policy makers.

② Division of Work Under Review into Categories

Present simple tense and past simple tense are often used in this part.

For example,

- a) As Bruch, et al. (1992) suggested earlier, shy students may drink less than peers with similar beliefs about the effects of alcohol on the self-regulation of behavior.
- b) The trade-growth-poverty relationship involves two critical linkages that have been at the center of heated debate during the past 10 years.

③ Evaluation of Work Under Review

Present simple tense and present perfect tense are often used in this part.