

## LECTURE 9: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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A literature review is a piece of academic writing demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the academic literature on a specific topic placed in context. A literature review also includes a critical evaluation of the material; this is why it is called a literature review rather than a literature report. It is a process of reviewing the literature, as well as a form of writing.

To illustrate the difference between reporting and reviewing, think about television or film review articles. These articles include content such as a brief synopsis or the key points of the film or programme plus the critic's own evaluation. Similarly the two main objectives of a literature review are firstly the content covering existing research, theories and evidence, and secondly your own critical evaluation and discussion of this content.

### Definitions:

“Comprehensive background of the literature within the interested topic area...”

(O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p. 31).

“Written document that presents a logically argued case founded on a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge about a topic of study”

(Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 4).

### Why we need Review of Literature

The purpose of a literature review is to gain an understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to a particular topic or area of study, and to present that knowledge in the form of a written report. Conducting a literature review helps you build your knowledge in your field. You’ll learn about important concepts, research methods, and experimental techniques that are used in your field. You’ll also gain insight into how researchers apply the concepts you’re learning in your unit to real world problems. Another great benefit of literature reviews is that as you read, you’ll get a better understanding of how research findings are presented and discussed in your particular discipline. If you pay attention to what you read and try to achieve a similar style, you’ll become more successful at writing for your discipline.

### An effective literature review must:

- Methodologically analyze and synthesize quality literature on a topic
- Provide a firm foundation to a topic or research area
- Provide a firm foundation for the selection of a research methodology
- Demonstrate that the proposed research contributes something new to the overall body of knowledge of advances the research field’s knowledge base.

## Types of Literature Reviews

The **Systematic Review** is important to health care and medical trials, and other subjects where methodology and data are important. Through rigorous review and analysis of literature that meets a specific criteria, the systematic review identifies and compares answers to health care related questions. The systematic review may include meta-analysis and meta-synthesis, which leads us to...

The **Quantitative or Qualitative Meta-analysis Review** can both make up the whole or part of systematic review(s). Both are thorough and comprehensive in condensing and making sense of a large body of research. The quantitative meta-analysis reviews quantitative research, is objective, and includes statistical analysis. The qualitative meta-analysis reviews qualitative research, is subjective (or evaluative, or interpretive), and identifies new themes or concepts.

These don't always include a formal assessment or analysis:

The **Literature Review** or **Narrative Review** often appears as a chapter in a thesis or dissertation. It describes what related research has already been conducted, how it informs the thesis, and how the thesis fits into the research in the field.

The **Critical Review** is like a literature review, but requires a more detailed examination of the literature, in order to compare and evaluate a number of perspectives.

The **Scoping Review** is often used at the beginning of an article, dissertation or research proposal. It is conducted before the research begins, and sets the stage for this research by highlighting gaps in the literature, and explaining the need for the research about to be conducted, which is presented in the remainder of the article.

The **Conceptual Review** groups articles according to concepts, or categories, or themes. It identifies the current 'understanding' of the given research topic, discusses how this understanding was reached, and attempts to determine whether a greater understanding can be suggested. It provides a snapshot of where things are with this particular field of research.

The **State-of-the-Art Review** is conducted periodically, with a focus on the most recent research. It describes what is currently known, understood, or agreed upon regarding the research topic, and highlights where there are still disagreements.

## How to write Review of Literature

- Introduce the topic and define its key terms
- Establish the importance of the topic
- Provide an overview of the amount of available literature and its types (for example: theoretical, statistical, speculative)
- Identify gaps in the literature
- Point out consistent finding across studies
- Arrive at a synthesis that organizes what is known about a topic
- Discusses possible implications and directions for future research

## Common Literature Review Errors

- Accepting another researcher's finding as valid without evaluating methodology and data
- Ignoring contrary findings and alternative interpretations
- Providing findings that are not clearly related to one's own study or that are too general
- Allowing insufficient time to defining best search strategies and writing
- Reporting rather than synthesizing isolated statistical results
- Choosing problematic or irrelevant keywords, subject headings and descriptors
- Relying too heavily on secondary sources
- Failing to transparently report search methods
- Summarizing rather than synthesizing articles

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