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Student Learning Development

Introduction to the Literature Review Process

PG Summer School 2024



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<http://student-learning.tcd.ie>



Overview

- Refining your research question
- Organising your literature
- Structuring your review
- Critically evaluating the literature



What is a Literature Review?

- A descriptive, analytic summary of the existing material relating to a particular topic or area of study.
- A process that involves an examination of prior scholarly works.

Bangert-Drowns, R. (2005). Literature review. In S. Mathison (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of evaluation*. (pp. 232-233). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: <http://0-dx.doi.org.leopac.ulv.edu/10.4135/9781412950558.n319>



Why is it important?

- **Shows a grasp of broader area**
 - Key ideas/debates/schools of thought
 - How main theories have been applied
 - Avoids replication of research
 - Evaluate previous research
- **Mind the gap!**
 - Justifies the need for your research
 - Justifies your approach/methods
 - Helps to define parameters/focus of your research
- **Synthesising**
 - Synthesise the literature of your area in a logical, coherent manner.



What does it look like?

- It depends on your subject/discipline
- Dispersed or a chapter?
- **Traditional (narrative) literature review**
 - Identifies and evaluates published literature on a topic
 - Usually employs a narrative approach
- **Systematic review**
 - Reviews results and data relevant to a research question in a standardized, systematic way.
 - Aim for an objective overview of evidence
- **Scoping review**
 - Precursive, initial scope to determine gaps.



Formulating a Research Question

A Research Question should be:

- Specific
- Focused
- Well defined

You should:

- Speak to your tutor
- Interrogate your question
- Think about your 'Why?'



Compare the following dissertation titles

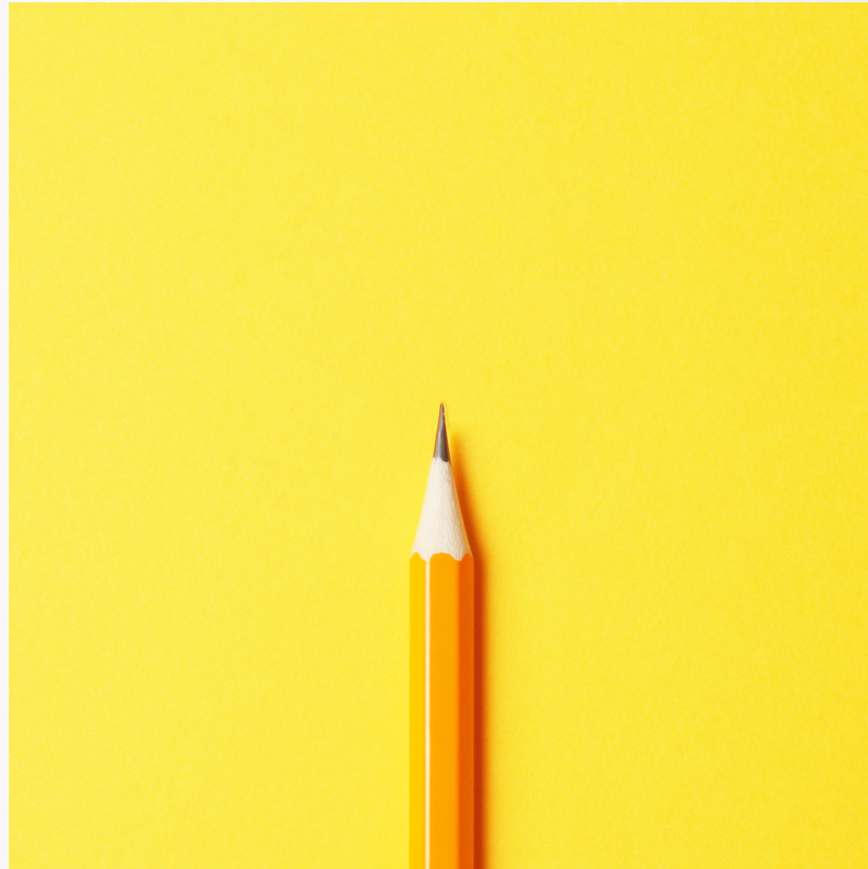
How has people's health been impacted by Covid?

What affect has Long Covid had on the mental health of 50-60 year old females working in acute hospital settings.



Your turn!

Take a few minutes to write down your research/dissertation question.



Refine it further...

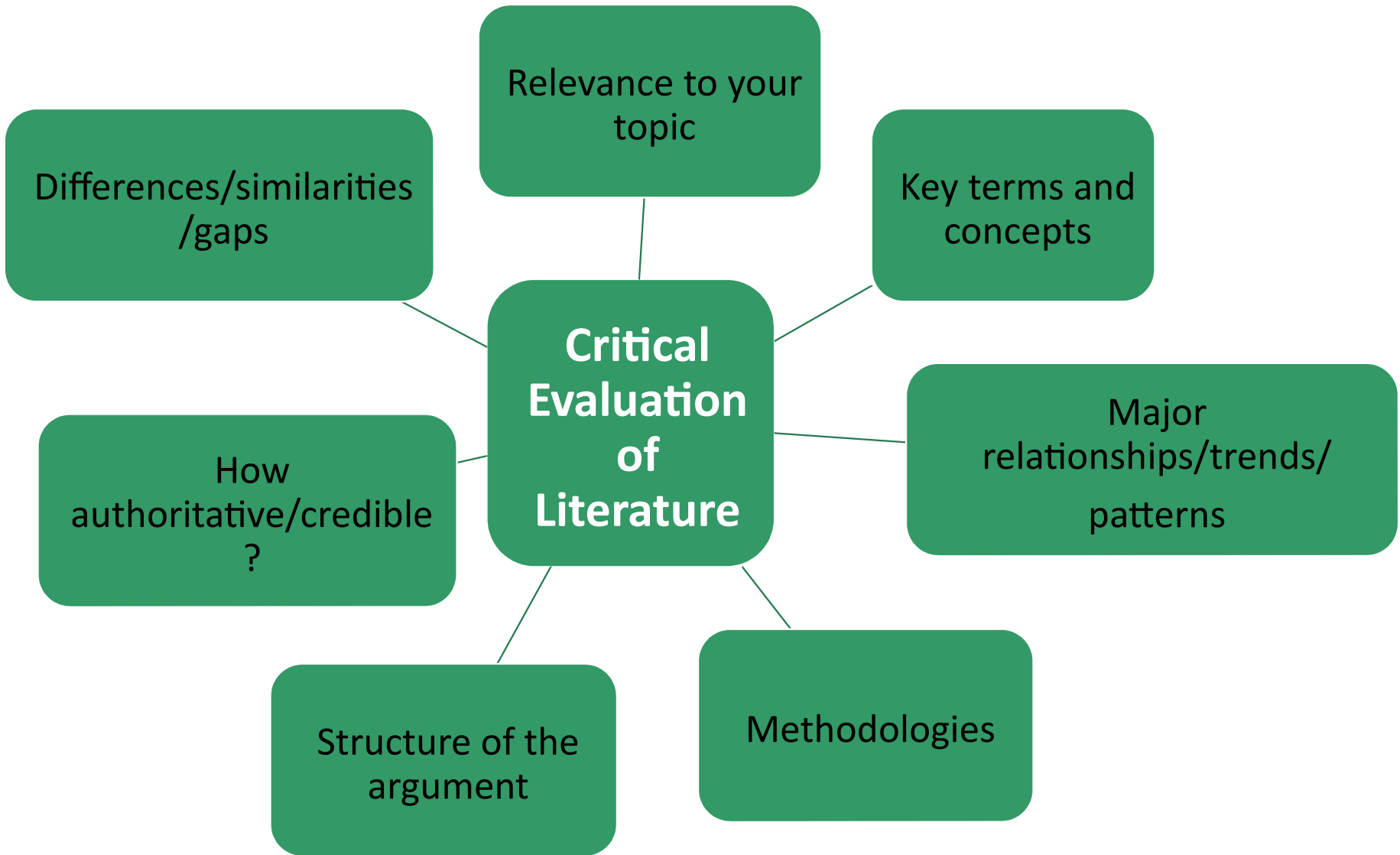
- Make large terms smaller/more specific
- Groups of people
- Geographical location
- Language (research done in English/other?)
- Timeframe
- Genre
- Setting



Reading & Notetaking

- Active reading
- Making connections
- Summaries/headings - central argument, main points, other academics that corroborate/disagree with idea/methodology
- Other bibliographies





Organise your information

- Spreadsheet - organise information from readings and compare
- Headings and keywords (quick searches)
- Citation spreadsheet- add quotes/paraphrases (page numbers!)
- Software tools (EndNote for references, Covidence for screening if doing a scoping/systematic review)
- EndNote has 'Research Notes'; a specific, searchable field for the purpose of putting in your own notes, quotations etc.
- Library can help with putting together references

Title	Authors	Date Published	URL	Main ideas	Methodology	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3



Structure

- Introduction, Body, Conclusion - Headings and Subheadings
- How to approach research question? Schools of thought?
Intersection between two areas?

Chronologically

- Is your research looking at how something has changed over time?
Review literature chronologically, tracking how ideas, attitudes, and theories have developed

Thematically

- Group literature by thematic subject areas, making connections clear

Methodologically

- Especially for experimental data/statistics – evaluate different methods used by previous academics



Introduction

- What is the review about?
- Why is it important?
- How did you identify the literature?
- How is the review organised?

https://writingcenter.ashford.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Sample%20Literature%20Review_0.pdf



Main body

Could include:

- Background
- Methodologies
- Previous studies on the topic
- Various viewpoints
- Main questions being asked
- Main conclusions that are being drawn

<https://www.citewrite.qut.edu.au/write/writing-well/litreview.html>



Conclusion

Summarise:

- Main agreements and disagreements
- Gaps or weaknesses
- Your opinions on the topic
- Relate to your own research question

https://writingcenter.ashford.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Sample%20Literature%20Review_0.pdf



Descriptive writing:	Critical analytical writing:
states what happened	identifies the significance
states what something is like	evaluates strengths and weaknesses
gives the story so far	weighs one piece of information against another
states the order in which things happened	makes reasoned judgments
says how to do something	argues a case according to the evidence
explains what a theory says	shows why something is relevant or suitable
explains how something works	indicates why something will work (best)
notes the method used	identifies whether something is appropriate or suitable
says when something occurred	identifies why the timing is of importance
states the different components	weighs up the importance of component parts
states the options	gives reasons for selecting each option
list details	evaluates the relative significance of details
list in any order	structures information in order of performance
states links between items	shows the relevance of links between pieces of information
gives information	draws conclusions

Descriptive Vs Critical Writing

Cottrell, S. (2013). *The Study Skills Handbook*, 4th edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan



Critical Evaluation in your Writing - Description

Descriptive

- Summarises what other people have found without saying what these findings mean for your investigation.
- Usually a chronological list of who discovered what, and when.

Examples:

- *"Green (1975) discovered ..."*
- *"In 1978, Black conducted experiments and discovered that ..."*
- *"Later Brown (1980) illustrated this in ..."*



Critical Evaluation in your Writing - Analysis

Analytical

- **Synthesises** the work
- Succinctly **passes judgement** on the relative merits of research
- Reveals limitations/need for further research – allows you to formulate and justify your investigation

Example:

- *“There seems to be general agreement on x, (see White 1987, Brown 1980, Black 1978, Green 1975). However, Green (1975) sees x as a consequence of y, while Black(1978) puts x and y as While Green's work has some limitations in that it, its main value lies in”*

(Examples taken from <https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/research-techniques/literature-reviews>)



Write, Rewrite

- Good structure/headings/subheadings can help you enter new research as you find it
- Keep research question in sight
- Keep reminding yourself of how it relates to your 'Why?'
- First draft is the starting point – don't worry about making the writing perfect
- Keep redrafting and refining
- Save different versions – V1, V2 etc
- Don't get disheartened



Useful Literature Review Resources

- Otago University:
<https://www.otago.ac.nz/hedc/otago615355.pdf>
- Toledo University: <http://libguides.utoledo.edu/litreview/home>
- Monash University:
<https://www.monash.edu/rlo/graduate-research-writing/write-the-thesis/writing-a-literature-review>

Other Resources

- Phrasebank <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>
- https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/1/1710/Critical_Thinking.pdf



Questions?

