

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This is the first task to be undertaken.

The purposes of the review are to:

- Ensure that the research is contextualised in theory
- Guarantee the currency of the research
- Focus on the research on that which is important
- Demonstrate understanding of relevant fields
- Clarify issues, hypotheses, problems and questions

Much preparatory work for the Literature Review has been implicit in earlier assignments. Students should be familiar with the required academic style, the referencing system and bibliographic form. (Re-read handbooks and notes, confirming with your tutor if you are unclear). However, the work does need to go beyond that undertaken for assignments, not just in length, but in the following respects:

- Ensuring that nothing important has been missed by conducting a library search eg. using indices such as ERIC
- Following up on references to locate primary sources
- Making extensive use of relevant periodicals
- Tracking publications throughout the year to maintain currency

The usual length (how long is that piece of string?) will depend on the topic and how widely recorded it is in the established literature. Most will aim for 7,000 words, and some may need to be as long as 10,000 words. During the first tutorial with your supervisor it will be important to establish which topics will need to be represented. There is a need to have a clear focus to avoid superficiality. The nature of the decisions made will be reflected and justified in an introduction to the Literature Review, which should also give an indication of its intended structure. Make use of sub-titles. Start with the wider issues eg. Brief historical overview, and move towards the precise focus of the research. In conclusion, identify the research issues, which have emerged and explain in summary how they have been highlighted by the literature.

Most important to the ultimate quality of the writing are four key abilities:

1. to select and link material in order to develop an argument and build a 'storyline'
2. to move beyond exposition to offer comparative critical analysis of the texts reviewed
3. to make strong choice of quotation to illustrate the argument
4. to reference meticulously and to record all bibliographic detail as reading progresses

THE CONTENT OF THE CRITICAL REVIEW

In writing your critical review you will need to:

- Show how your research relates to previously published research
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of previous work including omissions or bias and take these into account in your arguments
- Justify your argument by referencing previous research
- Through clear referencing enable those reading your assignment to find the original work you cite.

THE CRITICAL REVIEW

- Foundation on which research is built
- Helps refine research question(s) and objectives
- Highlights research possibilities that might have been overlooked
- Provides justification for own research question(s) and objectives
- Helps avoid simply repeating work already done
- Helps gain insights into aspects of research question(s) and objectives
- Provides insights into research strategies and methodologies that may be appropriate to own proposal