

# How To Write A Literature Review

Learning Enhancement Team

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# Variety is the Spice of Life!

Different Schools...

....Different Rules

- Can you use 'I' in an academic text?
- Should an essay have section headings?
- How long is a report?
- Do you use primary or secondary research?
- Footnotes, endnotes or no notes?
- Harvard style referencing or MLA? What about APA?

*Which school are you in? What is acceptable and what is unacceptable in your field?*

**Always check in your module handbooks or with your tutor if you are concerned about appropriacy**

# How To Write A Literature Review Aims

- To look at the structure and purpose of a Literature Review
- To discuss the process(es) of writing a Literature Review
- To look at ways to use research and references in a Literature Review



# What Is A Literature Review?

Depending on your school and programme, your Literature Reviews may have differences. However, generally a Literature Review is:

- An effective summary and synthesis of selected documents on a research topic. It may also include elements of evaluation
- A critical synthesis of previous research which leads logically to the research question(s) that you wish to ask/explore in your project or dissertation

What does all this actually mean?

What is 'synthesis'?

What is the purpose of a Literature Review?

# Purpose Of A Literature Review (1)

- Provides an overview of what has been said in the field
- Summarises who the key writers in the field are
- Summarises key theories, models, hypotheses, research findings – and more?
- Discusses what questions are being asked in the field

## *What is a theory?*

- *“Any concept, construct or conceptual framework that helps us think about and/or better understand some aspect of an issue of concern”  
(Cameron & Price, 2009)*

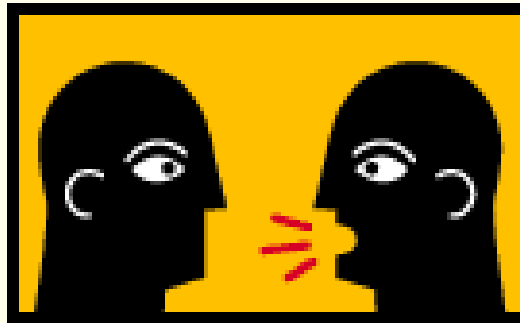
# Purpose Of A Literature Review (2)

- To establish the context for the topic/problem
- To place the writer's research in its historical context
- To synthesise and gain new points of view
- To highlight the significance of a particular issues or problems
- To distinguish what has been done from what needs to be done.

Being critical is essential when writing academically. If you feel unsure, try the **Critical Thinking AWL Open Workshop**.

# Entering A Conversation

Academia is in some ways very similar to a group of friends 'arguing' about sport or politics – just imagine you are coming late to the conversation. What do you do?



A Literature Review is about getting involved in the conversation, but is grounded in academic theory and reasoning.

# Entering The Conversation

## Intellectual (*logos*):

- Location of your question / problem within its wider academic / professional context
- Position of your research within the discipline; its meaning, significance, relevance and purpose

## Social (*ethos*):

- Establishing your right to speak
- Establishing why someone should read your work

## Rhetorical:

- General → specific pattern of information
- The creation of **the thread**

***What is the thread? Why is it important?***

# Features Of A Literature Review

What do you think makes a good / bad Literature Review?

## Poor Literature Reviews

Confusing and wordy

Is essentially an annotated bibliography

Uses only a minimum amount of sources

Only summarises the literature

## Good Literature Reviews

Clear and concise

Synthesises available research

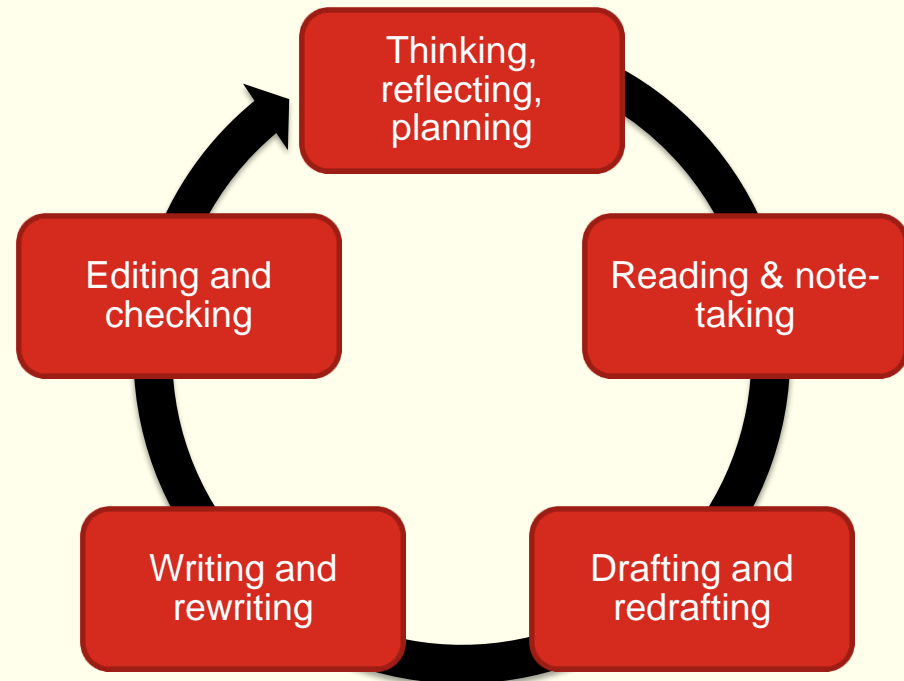
Uses a wide range of relevant, up-to-date sources

Evaluates, compares, contrasts and comments on the literature where possible

# Writing A Literature Review

What do you think are the different stages when writing a Literature Review?

1. Thinking of ideas
2. Sources
3. Narrowing
4. Notes
5. Assessment
6. Planning
7. Write, and rewrite



The truth is, all these stages happen concurrently – writing is a circular process

# Stage 1 – Thinking Of Ideas

## Brainstorm and source key literature in your area(s)

- Books, papers, articles and so on written by key authors in the field
- Policy and guidance documents

## Some initial starting points:

- Abstracts
- Course bibliographies in your module handbooks
- List of references in textbooks, articles and so on
- Electronic databases (eg. KeyNote)
- [Google Scholar](#)
- [Learning Resources Library Guides](#)
- [Summon](#)
- [Subject Librarian](#)

Don't forget the *AWL Open Workshop* **How To Read Journal Articles** can help you get to the crux of critical reading!

# Stage 2 – Select Your Sources

These are the stages when you find you are reading a lot – and it may not all make sense yet! Don't worry, this is perfectly natural.

1. Identify journal and magazine articles appropriate to your area of study and check the indexes for suitable articles
2. Follow up references and bibliographies in books and articles
3. Browse the library catalogues, look at the shelves
4. Refer to specialist reader lists from other parts of your course
5. Use the internet – but be very careful, and don't let the web become your primary source
6. If you get stuck, or reach a dead-end, you can always ask your tutor / lecturer for help

## Stage 3 – Narrow It Down

After so much reading, you need to refine! There are four key elements to consider:

1. Identify the focus of the field – this will be the general topic or subject area within which the problem or issue you are investigating is set.
2. Select the appropriate sources of information – from what you have read, what can you use directly? Indirectly?
3. Extract information of direct relevance – a Literature Review isn't the time to show off *how much* you have read. Keep it relevant!
4. Concentrate on those texts which provide information you need – you will need to have clarity in your writing

# Stage 4 – Take Notes

Note taking is crucially important. How do you take notes?

Good notes involve you and the text communicating – highlighting words or sentences *is not* good note taking.

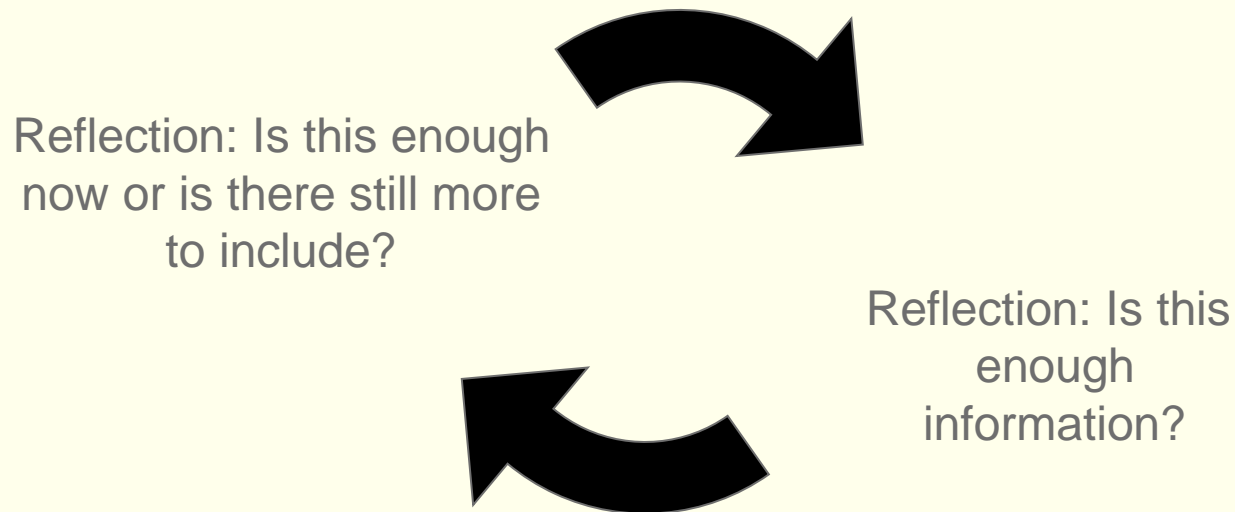
Some top tips:

1. Summarise
2. Paraphrase
3. Quote
4. Ask questions and make comments – this is your criticality!
5. Keep detailed referencing information in your notes – author, date, title, publisher



# Stage 5 – Assess Your Research

Everyone reaches that stage – the one where you have pages of notes and no idea what to do with them!



Sort and prioritise the literature you have already  
See which authors/ideas compliment each other  
See which authors/ideas disagree with each other

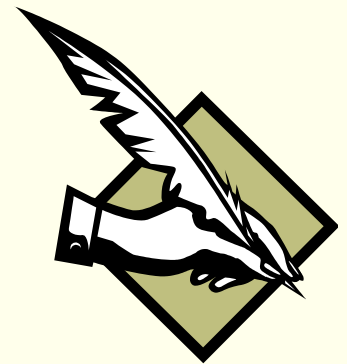
## Stage 6 – Plan

There are many different approaches to planning. With a partner, discuss:

How do you plan? Is it effective? *Do you plan?*

What's the best way to organise your literature Review:

- Chronologically?
- Thematically?
- By 'different schools of thought'?



## Stage 7 – Write And Rewrite



This stage can feel quite laborious and repetitive – but remember that high quality work is always the result of a careful drafting and redrafting process.

Did you know that an LDU **Tutorial** can be used to check plans and/or drafts? You don't need a 'finished' text to ask for help!

# Bring It All Together

“We do not store experience as data, like a computer: we story it”  
(Winter, 1998).

What do you think this means?

How might this apply to your Literature Review?

# Features Of A Literature Review

## Section

## Purpose

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### Introduction

- Provides overall context
- Mentions a range of topics
- Provides signposting
- Orientates the reader
- Introduces the *need to read*

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### Body

- A series of different paragraphs, each dealing with an individual topic
- Leads us logically to the conclusion
- Follows a logical structure for the reader

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### Conclusion

- Summarises the main points made in the Literature Review
  - Provides the writer's own views
  - Leads to the writer's own research
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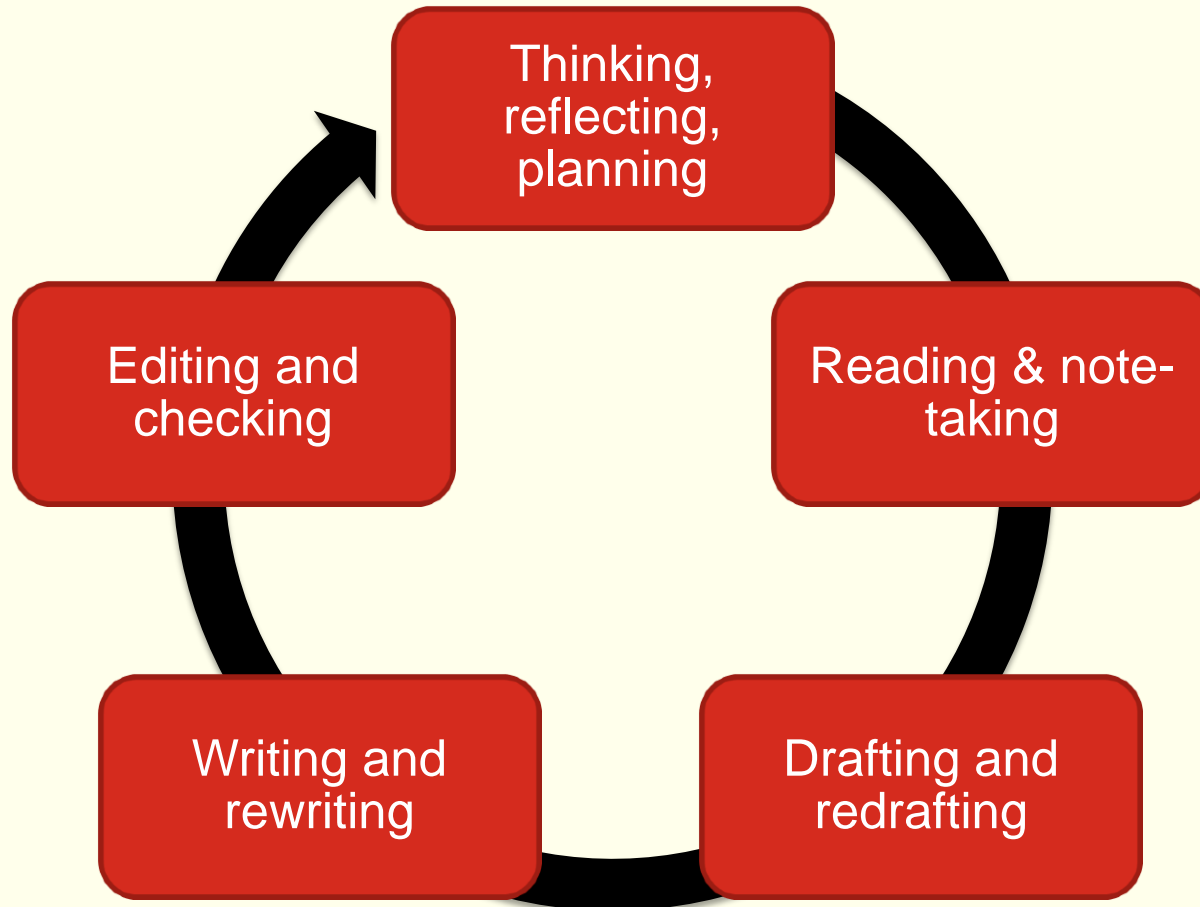
# Literature Review Introductions

Literature Reviews are like essays, and follow the same structure – including an introduction. A good introduction will typically:

- Introduce the topic generally
- Indicate why and in what ways the topic is important
- Highlight differences of opinion on the topic (?)
- Describe how the Literature Review will be structured




# Literature Review Process



# Weak Writing

- Lack of Planning
  - No direction
  - No focus
- Failure to dissect the problem/issue/question
  - Just writing about the general topic
- Letting the material ‘speak for itself’
  - Vague, detached, aimless writing
    - The reader is thinking “and..?”; “so what..?”
- Weak introduction
  - The reader can’t see what’s coming and why



Results in the text  
having **no genuine  
meaning**

# Task

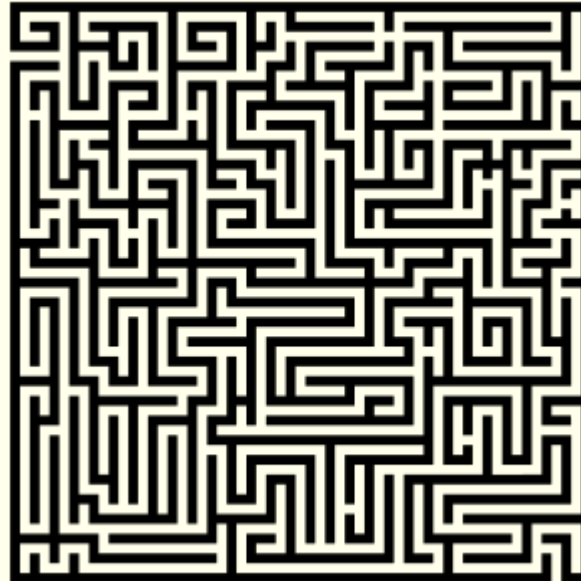
Criticality means putting yourself forward. Many writers wonder how can they come into their own writing, when they are usually exploring other people's ideas.

What do you think? Discuss with your partner.

- Text organisation and presentation
- Argument
- Analyses and balance of information
- Structuring of ideas and arguments
- Linking and signalling
- Relationship with reported knowledge
- Relationship with the reader(s) (i.e., being cautious / being confident)

# Good Writing

Good writing maintains **the thread**. Do you know the story of Theseus and the Labyrinth?



*“Ariadne, King Minos' daughter, fell in love with Theseus and gave him a ball of thread so he could find his way out of the Labyrinth”.*

# Theseus In The Labyrinth

Theseus found his way out of the Labyrinth by using a thread. You can do the same by:

- Create a thread (planning)
- Maintain the thread (stay focused)
  - Careful planning
  - Dissection of the research question / issues
  - Guide the reader through your argument(s) / analysis
  - Signposting your direction / your progress
  - Assertive introduction
  - Use topic sentences and transition paragraphs
  - Relate you ideas, arguments and statements back to the research question and/or the issues in **order to answer the question**

# Create Your Thread

Develop a crystal clear understanding of:

- The material you're reading
- Your research aims / research questions
- How your Literature Review leads into your aims / questions

Plan and structure your approaches

Develop analysis and argument(s)

Create and maintain your thread



## Or To Put It Another Way...

“To be accurate, write; to remember, write; to know thine own mind, write” (Tupper in Douglas (1937)).

To this we might add:

“to know thine own mind **and other people’s minds,**  
write”.

# Thinking...

- Finding things out
- Working things out
- Deciding
- Solving
- Justifying
- Remembering
- Planning
- Arguing
- Identifying
- Speculating
- Calculating
- Comparing
- Deducing
- Realising
- Implications
- Analysing
- Summarising
- Hypothesising
- Evaluating
- Sequencing
- Ordering
- Sorting
- Classifying
- Grouping
- Predicting
- Concluding
- Distinguishing
- Noticing exceptions
- Noticing connections
- Realising underpinnings
- Noticing assumptions
- Testing

(Adapted from McGuinness, 1999)

Don't forget, you can book a spot on the **Critical Thinking AWL Open Workshop!**

# Referencing

Why do you think referencing is so important in academic writing?  
Here's a clue, plagiarism is only one of the possible answers!

- To give yourself **credibility**
  - This establishes your right to participate in the field (ethos)
- To make yourself more **persuasive**
  - Giving evidence in your arguments (logos)
- To give **credit to the original author**
  - This shows professionalism and respect
- To give your readers **clear and sufficient** detail
  - This allows your readers to locate ideas for themselves

# Critical Referencing

Which reporting verb you chose can show the reader how *you* feel about the information you're referencing. What's the difference between:

*Claim State Stated Prove Suggest Argue*

- Truth states
- Your interpretation of the original writer's 'motivation'
- Your purpose

Tense is also important. Tense can show:

- Relevance
- Focus
- Generality ≠ specificity
- Truth

The *AWL Open Workshops*  
**Integrating Sources In Your Writing**  
offer more detail on critical  
referencing.

# Referencing

There are two ways you can include a citation in your text:

- Removed from the grammar of the sentence:
  - “Codes fix relationships between concepts and signs” (Hall, 1998:32)
  
- As a grammatical part of the sentence:
  - According to Hall (1998:32) “codes fix...”
  - As stated by Hall (1998:32) “codes fix...”
  - Hall (1998:32) states that “code fix...”

The LDU AWL *Open Workshops*  
**Understanding Plagiarism And**  
**Referencing** may also be useful.

# Paraphrasing

## Change the syntax

- i.e., the word order

## Change the word class

- i.e., a noun → verb; verb → adjective; verb → noun

## Use synonyms

- i.e., *happy, delighted, pleased...*

# Task

How many different ways can you say the same thing?

“I really like you, and you’re a great friend, but...”

“I think we’re going to have to let you go...”

# Language to Summarise

There are many different ways to summarise your sources, for example:

## *Essence*

- The essence of the argument is that .... (Emslie & Hunt, 2009).
- In essence, Emslie & Hunt's (2009) argument is that...
- Essentially, what Emslie & Hunt (2009) argue is that...
- At its heart, Emslie and Hunt (2009) are arguing that..

Other common verbs are:

Argue      Claim      Suggest      Show      Demonstrate

# Implications

What this shows us the essential importance of:

- Knowing your purpose / aims
- Knowing why you're using the material
- Knowing the material itself
- Understanding how the materials fits into the bigger picture – yours and the community's

**This will create genuine meaning (and paraphrasing / summarising) in your work**

# Avoiding Plagiarism

What advice do you have to help you avoid accidentally plagiarising?

- Write notes in your own words
- Be **fanatical** about keeping notes of where you get your information from when making notes
- In your own writing, use a clear and consistent system of referencing
- Always provide a full list of reference in your bibliography
- When in doubt – give a reference!

# Where now?

- Need more detailed assistance? [Book a tutorial!](#)
- Want feedback on a specific section? [Drop in to Getting Your Assignment Ready!](#)
- Want somewhere quiet to write, and get on the spot assistance? [Try The Writing Space!](#)
- Got a few quick questions? *AWL Office Hours* at [The Study Hub] are for you!
- *AWL Open Workshops* can be [booked here!](#)
  - *Suggestions:*
    - Critical Thinking
    - How To Read Journal Articles

# How To Write A Literature Review



**It's QUESTION TIME!!**