

# Preparing the Literature Review Section of a Dissertation

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# Overview

- Opening comments
- Reasons for doctoral students to review the literature
- Purposes of the literature review section of a dissertation
- Preparing the literature review section:  
20 pointers

# Some Opening Comments

# Note

Although this presentation was designed for doctoral students, most of it also can be useful to master's students.

# A Video Worth Watching

- “The Literature Review” (presentation by Candace Schaefer, Texas A&M University Writing Center)
- Available at <http://www.youtube.com/tamuwritingcenter#p/c/2/Y1hG99HUaOk>

# A Basic Theme of Today's Lecture

The literature review for a dissertation is not just a hurdle to overcome in order to receive a PhD. Rather, both the process and the product serve as foundations to build on in one's career.

# Some Reasons for PhD Students to Review the Literature

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- To gain familiarity with previous work in one's area of scholarly and professional interest
  - As preparation for research and writing
  - As preparation for teaching
  - As preparation for other work (for example, in policy-making or in consulting)
- To gain experience and skill in finding, analyzing, evaluating, and integrating information from others' research

# Some Reasons for PhD Students to Review the Literature (cont)

- To identify important unanswered questions on which to base dissertation topics
- To learn about approaches and methods to consider using in one's dissertation research
- To be able to put one's own research in context when writing one's dissertation
- To see examples of good scholarly/academic writing that can be models to follow

# Some Purposes of the Literature Review Section of a Dissertation

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- To show your committee that you're familiar with the research in your field
- To serve as a resource to use and extend later (for example, can be useful in teaching, policy-making, and further research)
- To set the context for the description of your dissertation research
- To help readers understand your dissertation research

# Some Purposes of the Literature Review Section of a Dissertation (cont)

- To help show why your dissertation research is important
- To lay the groundwork for presenting
  - The methods of your research
  - Your findings
  - Your interpretation of your findings

# Preparing the Literature Review: 20 Pointers

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1. Search the literature thoroughly, using a well-planned strategy. If possible, obtain help from a librarian.
2. Try not to be overwhelmed by the size of the task. Do a little at a time; it will add up.
3. Keep track efficiently of the literature that you've found. (A good way to do so is with bibliographic management software such as EndNote or RefWorks.)

# Preparing the Literature Review: 20 Pointers (cont)

4. Read carefully what you find. (Don't just collect.) To help assimilate the information, take notes in your own words.
5. Identify strengths and weaknesses of what you read.
6. Consider how various items that you read relate to each other.
7. Use others' (good) literature reviews as models.

# Preparing the Literature Review: 20 Pointers (cont)

8. Carefully organize your material. Among possible structures are the following: chronological, from general to specific, by topic, by method, and by theory.
9. To guide readers, include overviews and summaries.
10. Integrate points from various readings. Don't just summarize one reading after another.

# Preparing the Literature Review: 20 Pointers (cont)

11. In general, use your own words. Quote items only if there's a specific reason to do so— for example:

- if it's important for readers to know exactly what an author said
- if the author said something exceptionally well

12. If you use others' words, make clear that that the material is being quoted. To do so, use quotation marks or indentation. Be sure to cite the source.

# Preparing the Literature Review: 20 Pointers (cont)

13. Be sure to cite sources of information. In doing so, make clear what information came from what source.

- For example, if the facts in different sentences in a paragraph came from different sources, cite the source after each sentence; don't wait and cite all sources at the end of the paragraph.

14. Write simply and clearly. For example, where possible, use simple, common words.

# Preparing the Literature Review: 20 Pointers (cont)

15. Be sure to define each abbreviation.  
Consider including a table of abbreviations.  
Beware of using many abbreviations,  
especially if they're uncommon.
16. If appropriate, consider including one or  
more tables or figures.
17. Use the required bibliographic format.  
(EndNote tends to be helpful in this regard.)

# Preparing the Literature Review: 20 Pointers (cont)

18. Double-check the literature review, for example to make sure that you've accurately reported what the literature said.
19. Revise, revise, revise.
20. Get feedback from others, and revise some more.

# Note

Before preparing your literature review section, look at the literature review sections of some previous dissertations in your field. Your professor might be able to suggest some dissertations with literature review sections that can serve as models. Many dissertations are now available online.

# Closing Comment

A good literature review is a foundation for

- Doing good dissertation research
- Writing a good dissertation
- Using the literature well throughout the rest of one's career

Therefore the literature review is not a hurdle to overcome but rather an investment to cultivate.

Wishing you much success!