

## **The DSW Dissertation Literature Review**

### **What is a Literature Review?**

The literature review is a critical exploration of the existing research that is relevant to your dissertation topic. A review may be a self-contained unit—an end in itself—or a preface to and rationale for engaging in primary research.

A review is a required part of research and grant proposals, part of a published scholarly article, and a chapter(s) in traditional, book-length dissertations. Generally, the purpose of the review is to critically analyze a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison to prior research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles.

### **Purpose of the Literature Review**

- To provide background information about a research topic.
- To establish the importance of a topic.
- To demonstrate familiarity with a topic/problem.
- To set the stage for further work and allow you to join a scholarly conversation.

### **Elements of an Effective Literature Review**

In addition to serving the purposes listed above, an effective literature review should :

- Be organized around and directly related to the thesis or research question you are developing.
- Synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known.
- Identify areas of controversy in the literature.
- Formulate questions that need further research.

### **Writing the Introduction**

In the introduction, you should:

- Define or identify the general topic, issue or area of concern, this providing an appropriate context for reviewing the literature.
- Point out overall trends in what has been published about the topic; or conflicts in theory, methodology, evidence, and conclusions; or gaps in research and scholarship; or a single problem or new perspective of immediate interest.

- Establish the writer's reason for reviewing the literature (point of view); explain the criteria to be used in analyzing and comparing literature and the organization of the review (sequence); and, when necessary, state why certain literature is or is not included (scope).

## **Writing the Body**

In the body, you should:

- Group research studies and other types of literature (reviews, theoretical articles, case studies, etc.) according to common denominators such as qualitative versus quantitative approaches, conclusions of authors, specific purpose or objective, chronology, etc.
- Summarize individual studies or articles with as much or as little detail as each merits according to its comparative importance in the literature, remembering that space (length) denotes significance.
- Provide the reader with strong "umbrella" sentences at beginnings of paragraphs, "signposts" throughout, and brief "so what" summary sentences at intermediate points in the review to aid in understanding comparisons and analyses.

## **Writing the Conclusion**

In the conclusion, you should:

- Summarize major contributions of significant studies and articles to the body of knowledge under review, maintaining the focus established in the introduction.
- Evaluate the current "state of the art" for the body of knowledge reviewed, pointing out major methodological flaws or gaps in the research, inconsistencies in theory and findings, and areas or issue pertinent to future study.
- Conclude by providing some insight into the relationship between the central topic of the literature review and a larger area of study such as a discipline, a scientific endeavor, or a profession.

The information for this handout was taken from the following sources:

"Strategies for Writing Literature Reviews." The Penn State Graduate Writing Center

<http://composition.la.psu.edu/resources/graduate-writing-center/handouts-1/Literature%20Reviews%20Fall%202010.pdf/view>

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review>