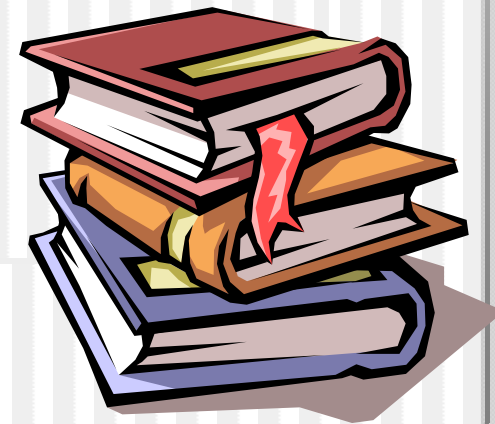




Critiquing Reviewed Literature



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This session focuses on ...

1. Adding the element of *critique* to literature reviewed. Let's discuss *why*...
2. Understanding that *crafting* the critique goes hand-in-hand with *assembling* a literature review. Let's look at *how* ...
3. Applying these foci to the topic of your choice and gaining critical reviews and peer feedback...

Ponder these points...

- What does critiquing the literature mean?
- What processes are involved?
- What criteria/arguments will you advance for your critical literature review?
- How do you know that your reading of the material of others, is reliable?
- How do you know their work is sound?
- How do you know you have achieved a critical literature review?

Stating the obvious ...

- If all research answers were able to be found in literature, there would be little incentive to conduct further research;
- But that is not the case and so literature informs novice and veteran investigators alike about aspects of the issue to be explored;
- Informative data may be mined from many sources.

Needed skills are not discrete - they are interlinked

- Finding literature is an essential skill;
- Assembling, managing and processing data to form the literature review is another essential skill;
- Infusing a critical perspective to make the review potent is yet another essential skill;
- If a LR stems from the application of integrated skills, how do you extend beyond reporting into critiquing? That is the nub.

Davidson & Tolich (2003, pp. 94 - 95) suggest these questions

- What have others said about this topic?
- What theories address this topic?
- What do those theories say?
- What research has been done previously?
- Is the existing research in agreement, or is there disagreement?
- Are there flaws in the existing literature?

Idaho University folk suggest asking these questions ...

- What are the strengths & weaknesses of the research approach?
- How well are interpretations & conclusions supported by presented data?
- Can findings be extrapolated/generalised?
- How do conclusions drawn compare/contrast with the work of others?
- What issues/questions emerge that warrant further research?

(Source: www.its.uidaho.edu/landscape_ecology/critiques, 18/9/01)

Intuitively, you know all that... But...

- The critique is neither a summary of papers perused nor is it reporting on books read;
- So if a LR stems from the application of integrated skills, how do you extend beyond reporting into critiquing?
- The answer resides in your head and is based on your capacity to frame questions whilst engaging with literature and ideas;
- Ongoing critical reflection is pivotal.

Quality, not quantity is the key ...

- In any research, the investigator typically is required to critically review literature that pertains to the topic/area/questions/issue being studied;
- Moreover, the review must be pertinent;
- In other words, rather than reporting on positively everything, confine yourself to critiquing key themes and issues;
- **YOUR STORY WILL BECOME ALL THE RICHER FOR BEING VALID, FOCUSED ...and THOUGHT PROVOKING!**

A non-critical review may involve

- Defining key terms;
- Identifying and summarising key approaches;
- Trawling through the work of key theorists who have written on the topic area;
- Summarising their prior research and their theories;
- Suggesting that your topic is important just because you say it is.

A critical literature review ...

- Arrives at a position concerning debates about key terms & key issues;
- Identifies, for engagement, key elements & themes to be mooted;
- Nominates & critiques key theories that pertain to mooted key elements & themes;
- Summarises & critiques relevant & important prior research;
- Explains how your critical commentary frames & informs the project/case study.

A critical literature review is actually an integrated qualitative research project ...

- Data are assembled throughout your research;
- Data are (continuously) sorted by categories (themes);
- Concise reporting of those themes occurs;
- Critical commentary is integrated with the reporting;
- Cross-tabulation (cross-referencing) of primary data with the literature (discursive or secondary data) occurs throughout the investigation.

As with all research projects ... quality processing is important

- Choose resource data carefully - check it out before including it. (*How will you do this?*)
- Actively process read the data. (*How will you do this?*)
- Evaluate what you've read. (*How will you do this?*)

(Source: www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/CriReadingBook 18/9/01)

The Introduction

- Defines general topic/issue;
→ *is concerned with establishing context of review*
- Traverses prior topic work;
→ *looks at history, debates, issues, gaps, problems*
- Establishes reasons for tackling topic & defines focus.
→ *justifies reason for reviewing literature, explains criteria for analysis & justifies literature exclusions*

The Body

- Groups literature by themes &/or types;
→ *common denominators, e.g. QL & QN, case studies, multiple site studies, theory debates, chronology, etc.*
- Summaries are detailed in accordance with merit of literature;
→ *BIG ISSUE - **big space**, minor issue, minor space*
- Structure is provided for the reader by highlighting key points the review is making.
→ *tell the reader what to discern*

The Conclusion

- Summarises major points that have emerged;
→ *Refer these points to the introduction you wrote*
- Evaluates the state of the art;
→ *Flaws, strengths, gaps, etc.*
- Sheds light on the central issue being investigated and its relevance to the discipline/profession.
→ *Apply the work to your context/discipline*

(Source: www.wisc.edu/writing/handbook/ReviewofLiterature 19/8/01)