Writing a Literature Review
Part Four: Critiquing the Literature

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Learning Outcomes for Part Four

By the end of this presentation, you should be able to:

- Critique the literature in your literature review.
- Know what to look for in critiquing a research paper.
Overview of Screencast (Part Four)

1. The importance of critiquing in a literature review.
2. Finding information to help you critique the literature.
3. Sample paragraphs that critique the literature.
The Importance of Critiquing

- Your literature review demonstrates how the literature you discuss supports the choices you have made about your study.
- Your review exposes gaps, shortcomings, inconsistencies and debates.
- It shows how the gaps or shortcomings led to your own research questions and research method.
- In this way, your literature review *critiques* the literature.
- Reading for a literature review requires active and critical reading.

Sources:
What to Look for When Reading Critically

- What is the main argument or conclusion? Has the author examined counterarguments and counterevidence?
- Does the argument build on the ideas or theories of others?
- Is the methodology appropriate and sufficient for addressing the research questions or objectives?
- Does the evidence support the conclusion or main argument?
- Is there potential bias or conflict of interest?
- Has the article advanced knowledge in the field?
- How does the article relate to others in the field?
Where Can You Find Information to Help You Critique?

- In the introduction and literature review sections of the paper you are critiquing, look for identification of the “gap” and ”shortcomings” of existing research.
- In the results and discussion/conclusions sections, look for the main conclusion, comparisons with others’ results, and discussion of limitations.
- In reviews and in general review papers, look for critiques of the article.
- In the research papers and literature reviews of other authors – look for competing perspectives, alternative causal claims, counterarguments, and critiques.
A Paragraph that Critiques the Literature

A number of studies have claimed that corrective feedback on ESL student writing is effective. However, the design of very few has included a control group, so it has not been possible to make a comparison between those who do and those who do not receive corrective feedback. Studies that fail to compare the effects of corrective feedback and no corrective feedback do not provide evidence of the effectiveness of corrective feedback (Ferris, 1999, 2004; Truscott, 1996, 2004). Of those that have made the comparison (Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Kepner, 1991; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998), three claim that corrective feedback had a positive effect on accuracy but, in each case, there were design issues that need to be taken into account when considering the value of their claims.

A Student Paragraph That Critiques the Literature

Although Caldwell (2008) has proposed an interesting model of Aboriginal education, she provides little evidence to back up her claim that schools have ruined community life on reserves. Scholars have pointed out that, far from ruining community life, schools in fact bring communities together by teaching students units that are based on life in their region (Bear, 2005; Jenkins, 2007). Others have drawn attention to the many schools that now collaborate with community Elders to teach and demonstrate indigenous knowledge (Hogue, 2008). By ignoring this evidence of positive change, Caldwell has not presented a complete picture of Aboriginal education.

Courtesy of a former student.
Summary

- A literature review should do more than review the literature; it should also critique it.
- Critiquing a research article involves active reading.
- You can find information to help you critique in particular parts of research papers.
- You can also find information in reviews and in research papers and literature reviews of other authors.