Writing a Literature Review
Part One: The Role and Purpose of a Literature Review
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Learning Outcomes for Part One

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

- Describe the role of a literature review.
- Explain the purpose of a literature review.
- Create a research space in a literature review for your own study.
Overview of Screencast (Part One)

1. Define a literature review and explain its function.
2. Review the types of literature reviews.
3. Describe the purpose of a literature review in a proposal or thesis.
4. Explain how to create a research space (CARS) for your own study in a literature review.
What Is a Literature Review?

- “The literature” is the body of scholarly work on a particular topic.
- A literature review is a formal analysis and assessment of this body of work.
- A literature review surveys, highlights, summarizes, synthesizes, interprets, and critiques this body of work.
- Literature reviews have strict conventions. They are even formulaic, but they do differ among disciplines.
Types of Literature Review

- Literature review – an essential part of proposals, theses, research papers and reports.
- Review paper – a published article, which, instead of presenting primary research, synthesizes and may critique the work that has been done on a particular topic.
- Mini-literature review – an assignment that asks you to explore a restricted number of publications in answering a particular question.
Purpose of the Literature Review in a Proposal/Thesis

- The literature review reveals what is known about your topic. It demonstrates how the literature you have chosen supports and explains the choices you have made about your study.
- Your research questions should be the guiding principle of the review, which should be more than a description of studies in the field.
- The literature review synthesizes and critiques the literature.
- It exposes gaps, shortcomings, inconsistencies and debates from which your research emerges.

Purpose of the Literature Review (continued)

- The literature review shows how the gaps or shortcomings led to your own research questions and research method.
- It should include only relevant works. These works should be critically analyzed.
- In writing the literature review, you build a case for your own study.

Purpose in a Nutshell

- To explain how and why you chose your research question and method.
- To demonstrate how the literature you have chosen supports and explains the choices you have made about your study.
- To synthesize and critique this literature.
The Task of Writing a Literature Review

The task of writing a literature review consists of three main parts:

- identifying relevant literature,
- organizing the literature, and
- organizing and writing the review itself.
A Literature Review As a Story

- Swales and Feak suggest that literature reviews should tell a story.
- The story should indicate why you chose your study.
- It should be logical, persuasive and, above all, interesting.
- It should help the reader to see that your research matters to the world.

Placement of the Literature Review

- The literature review appears near the beginning of a proposal or thesis.
- Often the introduction contains a brief overview of the literature.
- This overview is typically elaborated on in a special section of the paper that contains a more thorough literature review.
Two Formats for First Sections of Theses

- **Abstract**
- **Introduction**
- **Literature Review**

- **Abstract**
- **Introduction** (with Lit Review)
The Create a Research Space (CARS) Model

- Swales (1991) and Swales and Feak (2012) found that both introductions and literature reviews in proposals, theses, and papers typically create a research space (CARS). The CARS model has three main moves:
  - Establishing the research territory
  - Identifying a niche
  - Occupying the niche

Establishing the Research Territory

Swales (1991) and Swales and Feak (2012) indicate that you establish the territory by doing the following:

- Presenting background information about the topic or problem.
- Demonstrating that the general research area is key, central, problematic or relevant.
- Reviewing and synthesizing previous and current related research.

Identifying a Niche

Swales (1991) and Swales and Feak (2012) indicate that you identify a niche for your research using one of the following strategies:

- Announcing a gap or shortcomings in the existing research or a real world problem
- Questioning the findings or methods of the existing research
- Indicating your intention to continue a research tradition

Occupy the Niche

Swales (1991) and Swales and Feak (2012) indicate that you occupy the niche by doing the following:

- Stating the nature and purpose of your research
- Listing research questions and hypotheses (questions sometimes stated as objectives)
- Announcing principal findings (only in theses and papers not in proposals)
- Stating the value of your research (optional)
- Indicating the structure of the paper or proposal (optional)

Identify the “Moves” in this Abridged Introduction

Access to safe drinking water is essential for human health, yet natural processes and human activities often put drinking water sources at risk (AANDC, 2013; Patrick, 2014). Drinking water protection varies greatly across Canada (Wood, 2014), but it is particularly weak on First Nations. In 2010, 75% of First Nation on-reserve water systems assessed posed a threat to human health (Simms, Lightman, & de Loë, 2010). … One way for communities to sustain healthy water is to develop a source water protection plan (SWP), which aims to reduce the risk of waterborne contamination at the water source (Davies & Mazumder, 2003). SWPs also make economic sense for at least three reasons. …

Although Saskatchewan has implemented SWPs in several communities in the south, no plans are in place in the North (Government of Saskatchewan, 2015). Furthermore, no feasibility studies appear to have been conducted on using SWPs in Northern Saskatchewan, the region of the province most at risk from unsafe drinking water. The purpose of this research is to fill this need by working with three communities in northern Saskatchewan to develop a source water protection plan.

Courtesy of a Former Student
Summary

- A literature review synthesizes and critiques a body of work to support and explain the choices you have made about your study.
- Your literature review should create a research space (CARS).
- There are three moves in the CARS model: establishing the research territory, identifying the niche, and occupying the niche.