

Research Methods

Research Questions
and
Literature Reviews

What is your research question

Can you....

.....explain, in one sentence ending with a question mark....

.....what is the question that this research sets out to answer?

Why is this so important?

The research question:

- Focuses the research, as we need boundaries to make the work more manageable
- Guides the literature review

Why is this so important

- The type of question affects the design of the research:
 - 'Why' questions seek causal explanations
 - 'How' questions explain causal links
 - 'What' questions describe phenomena

Why is this so important?

Your research question is a work in progress, and will evolve as your work develops.

The Literature

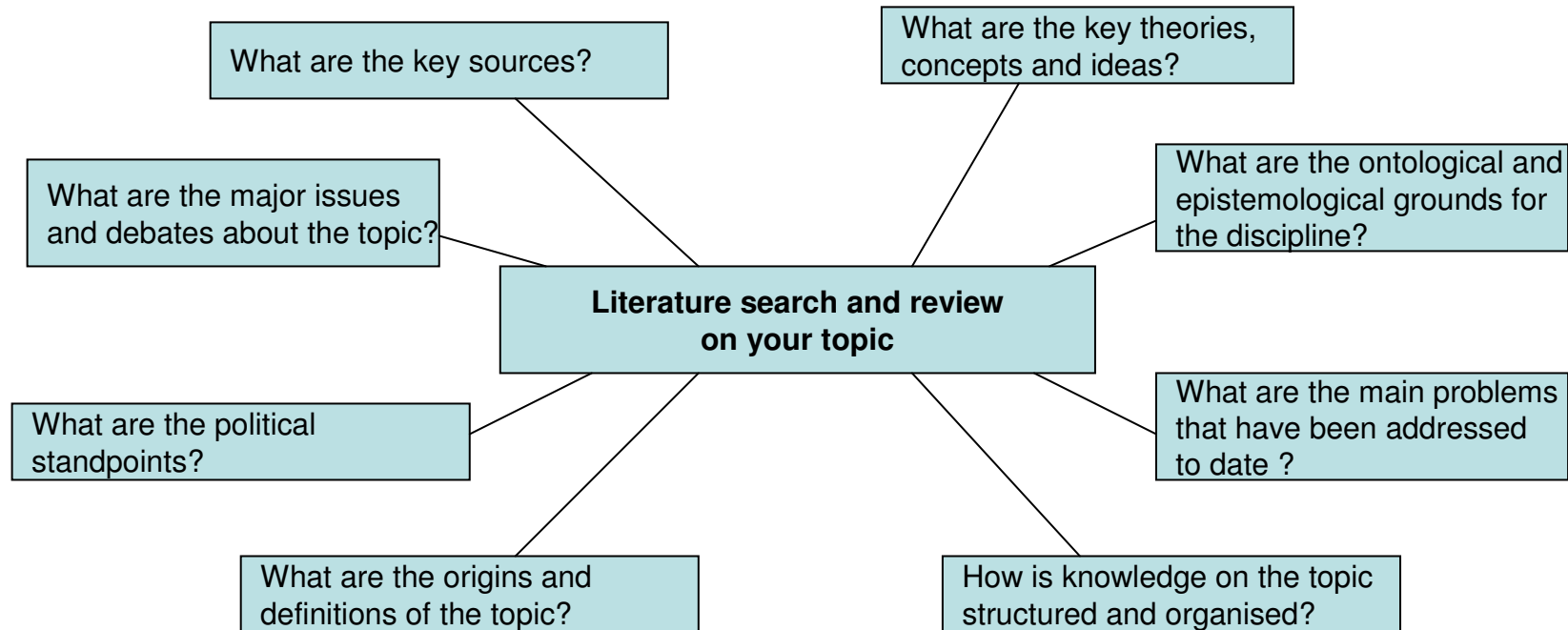
- This is published work which forms the basis upon which knowledge within the field is based
- As part of academic practice, it is a requirement to review relevant existing literature.
- This enables you to 'place' your own work within the relevant context.

The Literature

- You can gain a lot of ideas from reading the literature, which will impact on your research question, your methodology and your project.
- In most fields, the range of literature is vast, so you will need to select what it is you want to focus on

The questions the literature can answer

Source: Hart (1998) 'Doing a Literature Review



How have approaches to these questions increased our understanding and knowledge?

Reliable Sources of Literature

Most important are ***primary texts***:

- Top academic journals in your field of study
- Scholarly books and monographs
- Edited scholarly books
- Other academic journals
- Reports
- Conference papers

Reliable Sources of Literature

Secondary sources can be useful:

- Practitioner journals in your field
- Text books
- Evidence-supported management books (can provide links to primary sources)
- Authored web pages

Unreliable Sources of Literature

These can include:

- Anonymous websites
- Airport-type management books
- Magazines

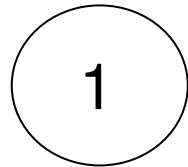
Map Before You Start

Mapping the literature that is relevant to your research question helps to:

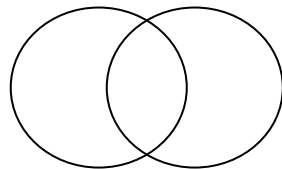
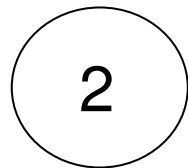
- Ensure you cover the key literatures relevant to your topic
- Identify which literatures to search
- Identify which keywords to use in searches
- Start building your argument

Locating the Literature Fields

- Identify the first broad relevant area

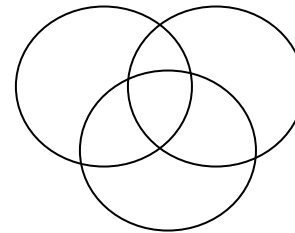
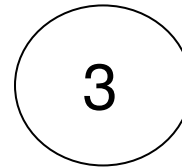


- Identify another literature area and then determine the cross over - this is a relevant area



Locating the Literature Fields

- Identify the third broad area of relevant literature
 - Identify the new cross-overs
- 1 core literature and relevant literatures



Some Tips

- Make sure you know the core literature well
- If you have more than 3 areas you probably have too much - revise your research question
- If you have only two areas, the field might be too wide. Think about adding context or situation to narrow the field

The Purpose of a Literature Review

- Distinguish what has been done before, from what needs to be done now
- Identify relationships between research and practice
- Establish the context
- Place the research in a historical context

The Purpose of a Literature Review

- Acquire the vocabulary of the topic
- Demonstrate familiarity with new developments
- Identify the main methodologies used
- Provide a basis for discussing your research findings

What Makes A Good Literature Review?

- Clarify the relationship between your proposed study and previous writings - stake your work in the field
- A critical analysis of previous work to expose gaps or shortfalls
- An appraisal of different models or theories, building the case for those you choose for your study
- A story leading up to the point at which your study enters stage left - or right!

Not:

- A list of previous studies, without argument or analysis
- A broad sweep of the wider literature, with little or no links to the issues in your proposed study
- A compiling of facts without analysis
- Unsubstantiated feelings or opinions