

HKBM7019 HANDOUT

Organizing a Literature Review

A successful literature review should have three parts that break down like this:

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Defines and identifies the topic and establishes the reason for the literature review.
2. Points to general trends in what has been published about the topic.
3. Explains the criteria used in analysing and comparing articles.

B. BODY OF THE REVIEW

1. Groups articles into thematic clusters, or subtopics. Clusters may be grouped together chronologically, thematically, or methodologically (see below for more on this).
2. Proceeds in a logical order from cluster to cluster.
3. Emphasizes the main findings or arguments of the articles in the student's own words. Keeps quotations from sources to an absolute minimum.

B. CONCLUSION

1. Summarizes the major themes that emerged in the review and identifies areas of controversy in the literature.
2. Pinpoints strengths and weaknesses among the articles (innovative methods used, gaps in research, problems with theoretical frameworks, etc.).
3. Concludes by formulating questions that need further research within the topic, and provides some insight into the relationship between that topic and the larger field of study or discipline.

Creating Clusters or Subtopics

Chronological Groupings: With this method, you can group material according to when it was published or the time period the material addresses. For example, for a literature review about post-1965 immigration to Hong Kong, you might group the material that addresses the 1960s and 1970s in one section, and the 1980s and 1990s in another. This method works well in essays that trace the evolution of a certain theme or idea over time, but can be less coherent in other contexts.

Thematic Groupings: In this approach, sections might be organized around particular subthemes within the essay's topic. For the post-1965 immigration essay mentioned above, you might organize separate sections on literature dealing with different ethnic groups: S.E. Asians, Eastern Europeans, N. Americans, etc.

Methodological Groupings: A methodological approach differs from the two above in that it does not focus so much on the content, but the "methods" of the researcher or writer. In the above example, authors who interpret demographic data from the census might be put in one group, while another group might be formed around work that uses ethnographic approaches.

**This handout was adopted from the fine folks at Brooklyn College Library*

source: Library & Writing Center at Niagara University

Literature Review: Relational Words and Phrases

The entire point of writing a literature review is to synthesize, or write about the relationships between, the articles you're using, defining the connection between them and explaining how they come together to represent a body of knowledge on a subject. The following words and phrases are useful because they express specific types of relationships between ideas:

on one hand
on the other hand
contrary to
in line with
parallel to
related to
linked to
responds to
elaborates
undermines
explores / investigates
contributes to the research on
enters the debate
re-emphasizes the categories
in agreement with
in opposition to
in confirmation of
in response to
in reaction against
in contrast to
influenced by
rejects
confuses
reinforces
a similar focus/approach/tone
a slightly different focus/approach/tone a broader scope a narrower scope
more specific / more general in the same vein
in a different sphere
adapts
misses
supports
revisits the same subject
revolutionizes the field of
bypasses the debate
breaks out of the paradigm
goes beyond
misinterprets
criticizes