

MBA DISSERTATION

Extended Literature Review

Updated: Spring 2026

Recommended structure

Section	Word Count (Approx.)	What it is / Key Focus
Introduction	1,000 – 1,300	Sets the context, defines the business problem, states the Research Questions (RQs), and outlines the scope of the review.
Methodology	1,500 – 1,800	Explains <i>how</i> you found the papers and how you analysed them. Includes search strings, databases used, and the inclusion/exclusion criteria to prove rigor.
Thematic Review	6,400 – 7,500	The central piece of the work. Organized by themes (e.g., Entry Modes, Cultural Distance) rather than by author. It compares, contrasts, and synthesise different academic views.
Discussion	2,600 – 3,400	Your critical interpretation. You identify gaps in current knowledge, resolve conflicting arguments, and potentially propose a new conceptual framework.
Implications	1,200 – 1,500	Translates theory into practice. What should scholars and practitioners do differently based on your findings?
Conclusion	800 – 1,000	Summarizes the answers to the RQs, acknowledges the limitations of your review, and suggests areas for future research.
TOTAL	13,500 – 16,500	A comprehensive, high-level command of the chosen topic.

Explanation

1. Introduction (1,000–1,300 words)

Purpose

The Introduction sets the foundation for the dissertation by presenting the research problem, explaining why the topic is important, and establishing the overall direction of the extended literature review. It provides the reader with a clear understanding of the study's rationale, scope, and guiding questions.

Components

Your Introduction should include:

1. Background of the research topic: Explain the broader context and academic/industry relevance of the topic.
2. Research problem or gap in the Literature: Identify what is *not yet known*, *under-researched*, or *contested* in existing scholarship.
3. Urgency or timeliness of the topic: Explain why the topic is significant *now*—e.g., emerging trends, recent disruptions, managerial implications.
4. Research aim and objectives: State the overall purpose (aim) and break it down into 3–5 focused objectives.
5. Research questions: List the main question(s) that guide the literature review and structure your thematic analysis.
6. Scope of the review: Define boundaries—topics included/excluded, timeframe, industries, geographies, or theoretical limits.
7. Structure of the dissertation: Provide a brief overview of how the dissertation is organised into chapters or thematic sections.

Guidance for writing this section

- Be clear and persuasive: The introduction should convince the reader that the topic is academically important and worthy of an extended literature review.
- Establish a strong rationale: Link the background to the identified gap and research questions.

- Keep it focused: Avoid excessive detail; save deep analysis for the thematic chapters.
- Use academic sources sparingly: You may cite key studies to justify the importance or timeliness of the topic.
- End with a roadmap: The chapter outline prepares the reader for what follows.

2. Methodology of the Literature Review (1,500–1,800 words)

Purpose

- The purpose of the Methodology section in an Extended Literature Review (ELR) is to explain how the literature was systematically located, selected, evaluated, and analysed.
- Even though no primary data is collected, the dissertation must still follow a transparent and replicable process, demonstrating academic rigour. This section ensures the review is credible, unbiased, and based on a justified method.

Components

Your methodology chapter should include the following:

1. Search strategy: Describe how you searched for relevant literature, including:
 - overall approach (systematic, semi-systematic, integrative)
 - rationale for the chosen strategy
 - use of Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT)
2. Databases and sources: List the academic databases used, such as: copus, Web of Science, Business Source Premier, Google Scholar (supplementary only), ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight. Explain why these databases are appropriate for your topic.
3. Keywords and search terms: Include: main keywords, related synonyms, controlled vocabulary (e.g., MeSH terms if relevant), sample search strings. Explain how keywords were developed and refined.
4. Time frame for included publications: Specify the range of publication years you focused on. For example: Studies published between 2015–2025. Earlier foundational studies included where relevant. Justify the time frame (e.g., rapid changes in technology or policy).

5. Inclusion and exclusion criteria: Provide a clear set of rules used to decide which studies were kept or removed.

For example:

Include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- High-quality academic books or book chapters
- Studies published after 2021
- Literature directly addressing the research questions

Exclude:

- Non-academic online sources
- Opinion pieces or non-peer-reviewed material
- Conference abstracts without full papers
- Studies irrelevant to the topic or context

Explain and justify why each criterion matters.

6. Screening process (PRISMA-style)

Describe the screening stages:

- Identification: number of studies retrieved
- Screening: removal of duplicates + title/abstract review
- Eligibility: full-text assessment
- Included studies: final number incorporated into analysis

Use (or reference) a PRISMA flow diagram in the appendix.

7. Quality assessment of included studies

Explain how you evaluated the quality and relevance of the literature.

Examples:

- journal ranking (ABS, ABDC)
- methodological robustness
- sample size and validity

- relevance to research questions
- theoretical contribution

Specify the criteria or scoring system (if used).

8. Analytical method: how the literature was examined

Explain your approach to analysing the final set of studies:

- Thematic analysis (most common for ELRs)
- Conceptual mapping
- Narrative synthesis
- Integrative review techniques

Describe how themes were identified and refined.

Guidance for writing this section

- Be transparent and replicable: A reader should be able to repeat your process and retrieve similar sources.
- Justify every choice: Why these databases? Why these years? Why thematic analysis?
- Avoid primary research language: No mention of sampling populations, interviews, surveys, etc.
- Include a PRISMA diagram: This visually strengthens methodological credibility.
- Link methodology to your research questions: Explain how your search and analysis approach supports answering them.

3. Thematic Literature Review / Analysis (6,400–7,500 words)

Purpose

The primary objective of the Thematic Review is to map the conceptual landscape of a specific field through the lens of overarching themes rather than individual authors. By shifting the focus from specific studies to recurring concepts, the researcher demonstrates a high-level command of the literature. This approach allows for the identification of consensus, the exploration of theoretical tensions, and the validation of the research's significance. Ultimately, the purpose is to

construct a robust theoretical and empirical foundation that clarify the appropriate understanding of the topic.

Components

An example structure is provided below:

Theme 1: Theoretical foundations

- Key theories: identify and explain the dominant theoretical frameworks provide the underlying logic for understanding your chosen topic.
- Conceptual Definitions: Clearly define key concepts using reliable academic sources.

Theme 2: Empirical findings

- Major findings across studies: Synthesize the consistent data from previous research to demonstrate established patterns in the topic. Link these patterns with your research questions.
- Contradictions in results: Identify differences found in important studies. Clarify how these differences are relevant to your research questions.

Theme 3: Emerging Debates

- New perspectives: Examine the topic from new angles – show how these new approaches could help addressing the research questions.
- Critical discussions: Compare, contrast, synthesise the different understandings of the topic.

Theme 4: Research Gaps

- What previous studies did not address: Previous sections discussed what was studied. This section clarify the specific limitations or overlooked variables in existing literature.

Guidance for writing this section

To maintain the required academic rigor and critical depth, the following writing strategies should be employed:

- Synthesized paragraph construction: one approach is to start with a thematic claim, followed by evidence from several authors that supports, refutes, or nuances that claim.

- **Maintaining analytical criticality:** The researcher must remain an objective evaluator of the literature. Criticality is achieved not by stating personal opinions, but by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the methodologies used in the reviewed papers. For example, one might note that while a theory is robust in developed economies, its applicability to the chosen host country is limited due to differing legal or cultural infrastructures.
- **Focus on the research questions:** Periodically reconnect the thematic discussion to the broader research objective. At the conclusion of each major theme, provide a brief transition that explains how these academic findings directly help to address the research questions.

4. Discussion (2,600–3,400 words)

Purpose

This section synthesises the literature and answers the research question.

Component

- **Integration of Findings:** This involves pulling together disparate pieces of evidence from various sources to form a unified and logical answer to your specific research question.
- **Comparison Between Studies:** You must critically evaluate where different authors agree or disagree, exploring why certain studies might yield different results based on their context or methodology.
- **Theoretical Implications:** Explain how your findings support, challenge, or extend the existing academic theories discussed earlier in your work.
- **Identification of gaps:** Highlight the specific areas where the current literature is insufficient or silent, justifying why your particular focus or case study was necessary to fill those voids.
- Often this section proposes a conceptual framework or model as the result of the prior analysis and discussion.

Guidance for writing this section

- Don't repeat the Thematic Literature Review, but build up on it. This section addresses the research questions, while the previous section examines the literatures and aligns them with the research questions.

- Examine what was missed in previous studies and explain how your specific analysis has now filled that research gap.
- Use your findings to propose a new visual framework or process that address the topic.

5. Implications (1,200–1,500 words)

Purpose

This section evaluates the real-world and academic significance of your findings. It translates your synthesis into actionable insights for the industry and provides a roadmap for future scholarly inquiry.

Components

Theoretical Implications

- Refining the framework: Detail how your study specifically advances, modifies, or contradicts the existing theories within your chosen context.
- Academic contribution: Explain how your proposed conceptual model (from Section 4) provides a new lens for other researchers to view the industry or problem.

Practical & Managerial Implications

- Strategic recommendations: Provide concrete, evidence-based advice for managers and organizations based on your analysis.
- Policy & industry impact: Address how your findings should influence decision-making, risk management, or regulatory compliance for policymakers and stakeholders.
- The "action plan": Use your findings to suggest "best practices" or specific strategic pivots for companies operating in the target market.

Research Implications (Future Directions)

- Addressing limitations: Acknowledge the boundaries of your study (e.g., sample size, time constraints, or specific geography) and how they impact the results.
- Future research agenda: Propose specific questions or methodologies that future scholars should explore to further bridge the gaps you identified.

Guidance for writing this section

- Be prescriptive, not descriptive: Don't just describe your findings again. Instead, use phrases like *"Managers should prioritize..."* or *"This study suggests a need for a policy shift in..."*
- The "three-lens" rule: Ensure you balance your word count between Theory (What we know), Practice (What we do), and Future (Where we go).
- Justify your recommendations: Every piece of advice you give to a scholar or manager must be directly linked back to a finding you synthesized in the previous Discussion section.

6. Conclusion (800–1,000 words)

Purpose

The conclusion provides a final synthesis of the entire research project. It brings the reader back to the original research question and provides a definitive answer while reflecting on the journey and value of the study.

Components

- Answer the research question: Explicitly state the final answer to your primary research question. Reiterate the 3–4 most significant discoveries from your review in a concise, high-impact manner.
- Highlight contributions: Clearly define what your research has added to the academic and practitioner fields.
- Clarify limitation: assess the boundaries of your work. This might include the scope of the literature reviewed, the specific time frame of the data, or the inherent bias in the selected case studies. Explain how these limitations should be considered when interpreting your final conclusions.
- Final recommendations and future research: Building on the gaps identified in section 4, propose 2–3 specific "next steps" for the academic community. End your work with a strong, memorable statement that reinforces the importance of your topic in the modern global business environment.

Guidance for writing this section

- Avoid new information: Never introduce a new author, theory, or data point in the conclusion. If it's important, it should have been in the discussion chapter.
- The "so what?" factor: By the end of this section, the reader should feel that your 15,000 words have successfully address a research gap or a theoretical issue.

7. References

Use the required referencing (usually 50–100 sources for a Master's dissertation).

8. Appendices (Optional)

Possible appendices:

- Search strategy table
- List of reviewed paper
- PRISMA diagram
- Data extraction table