

**Research Methods**

# **Literature Review**

# What is a Literature Review

*A literature review is a piece of academic writing demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the academic literature on a specific topic placed in context.*

*A literature review also includes a critical evaluation of the material; this is why it is called a literature review rather than a literature report*



# Purpose of a Literature Review

Describe the current state of research in the area you are looking in to (keep it relevant)

Add any other areas that might be of relevance

Identify a gap in the research – this is where your activities will fit in or expand or support existing knowledge

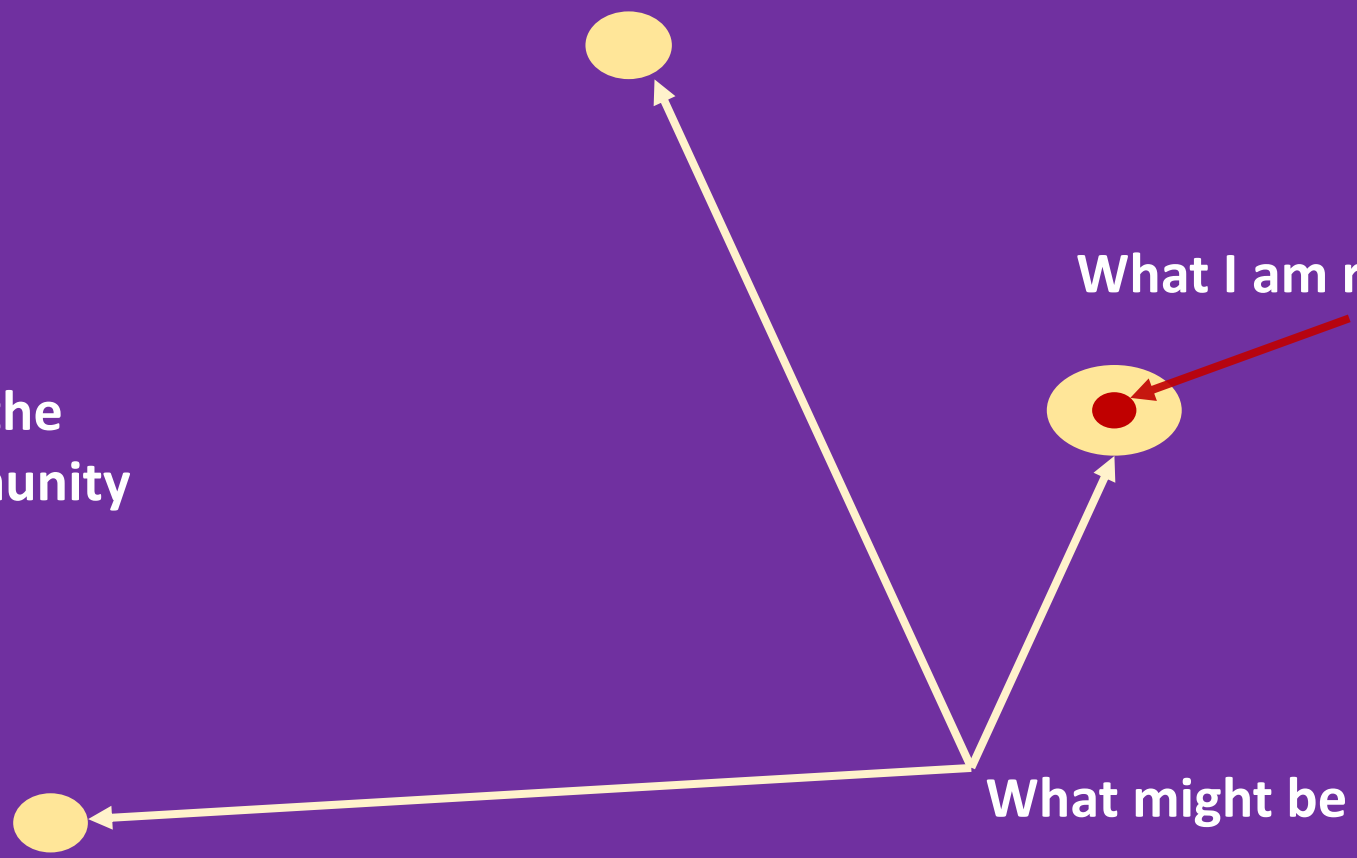
Lead the reader comfortably to the aims and objectives

# Literature Review

Works from the  
Research Community

What I am researching

What might be relevant to  
my research



# Reporting vs Critical Analysis

**Reporting** – One source and you describe it

**Analysis** – Two or more sources that agree and you describe how they support each other and how they support your theories or the reason for your research

**Critical Analysis** – Multiple sources that may agree or disagree with your hypothesis/expected outcomes and you present reasoning for why they are or not applicable to your study. Critique (politely) the author(s) methods and findings

**Where to Start** – A text book, a journal paper, an accepted model/strategy, an idea, an internet search – find a key source or key concept

**Follow the Trail** – References from your key journal or text book, look at who they've referenced or what topics they've referenced and follow the trails

**Good or Bad Source** – This is your decision! Generally good ones are regularly cited, come from experts in that area, have a strong methodology and are clear in their limitations. But not always the case ...

**Read the Title** – Does it fit with, or have elements that fit with, your research?

**Read the Summary** – The summary should give you a good overview of what the author(s) did and what they found out. If their results suit your narrative then read the full content

**Your Critique** – Just because the results support your hypothesis doesn't automatically make it a good source. And vice versa. Read the methodology, read the analysis. Do you think the methods were valid and reliable, is the analysis provided suitable for the data produced?

From my PhD (2005)

“Engineering companies should also be involved in this process, as they can offer a real life view of engineering and help to improve the views of the general populace as to the real nature of engineering”

|                   | Example  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Full quote</b> | Baker (2005) states that “Engineering companies should also be involved in this process, as they can offer a real life view of engineering and help to improve the views of the general populace as to the real nature of engineering” |
| <b>Part quote</b> | That engineering companies should take part in outreach activities is a common recommendation in the literature as they can “help to improve the views of the general populace as to the real nature of engineering” (Baker, 2005)     |
| <b>No quote</b>   | Baker (2005) also recommends that engineering companies should get involved in outreach activities as their involvement will help to show what engineering is really like.   |

# Literature Review Practicalities

**Colour Highlighters** - Use different colour highlights or underlining to identify quotes for different topics or themes in your literature review

**Colour Tabs** - Use different colour tabs to identify quotes or sections that could be included in your literature review

**Spreadsheet** - Create a spreadsheet with fields “author(s)”, “year”, “quote” and “topic” and copy each quote into the spreadsheet. You can then order by “topic” when you want to write up

Do the sources relate to the topic?

Do the sources agree or disagree with your theory/question?

Are the sources' methods suitable?

Are the sources' findings appropriate?

Have you reported or critically analysed the sources?