



**Literature Reviews: An Introduction**

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**Literature Review: An Examination of the Key Research on a Topic**

**Seeks to answer the following questions:**

- What have others said about this topic?
- What theories address the topic?
- Which policies address the topic? (If relevant)
- What research has been done previously on the topic?
- Do the results of the existing research agree with one another, or is there disagreement?
- What are the gaps in the existing literature?

(Adapted from Davidson & Tollich, 1990)

**Different uses of literature review in assignments**

- Review leading to research questions/hypotheses
- Review leading to conclusions on the topic (and recommendations)
- Review leading to new or adapted theoretical model or framework for new model

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**Review leading to research question(s)**

**Review leading to conclusions on topic**

**Review leading to new/adapted theoretical model**

### How is a literature review organised?

- by key themes or findings
- arranged in headings and sub-headings
- as an **argument** that *flows*
  - information from various sources is *synthesised* to form a coherent argument

#### Topic: What are the most effective measures to prevent smoking onset amongst adolescents?

- Restrictions on tobacco advertising*
  - Tobacco advertising and smoking initiation
  - Effectiveness of banning advertising
  - Alternative forms of tobacco promotion
- Restrictions on sales to adolescents*
  - Age limits
  - Restricting sales to tobacconists only
- Product regulation*
  - Labelling
  - Ban on small packaging
- Price increase of tobacco products*
- Health education*
  - Mass-media campaigns targeted at youth
  - Smoking prevention programmes in schools

Themes/issues that emerge in the literature

Set out under headings and sub-headings

Synthesis of research on topic

(Source: Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007)

### Synthesise information on existing research

A literature review is not just a collection of summaries:

Research by Brown (2002)

Research by Smith (2005)

Research by Atken (2007)

#### Synthesise information on existing research on the topic

→ **Where is your voice here?** What is the point you're making about the topic in this paragraph? Which issue does the research highlight?

Research by Brown (2002)

→ **Where is your voice here?** What is the relationship between Brown's research and Smith's research?

Research by Smith (2005)

→ **Where is your voice here?** What is the relationship between Atken's research and that of Brown and of Smith?

Research by Atken (2007)

How are all these linked to your research question?

### Synthesise information on existing research

#### 2. Restrictions on tobacco advertising

##### 2.1. Tobacco advertising and smoking initiation

Several studies have shown that children are aware of cigarette advertisements and that they remember specific advertising manifestations (Altman et al., 1996 ; DiFranza et al., 1991; Hastings et al., 1994; Nelson and White, 1992), even children aged under 6 years (Fischer et al., 1991). For example, Hastings et al. (1994) showed that a campaign to promote Imperial Tobacco's "Regal" brand in the U.K. was getting through to children more effectively than it was to adults. It held much more appeal for teenagers than for adults. This study contributed to Imperial Tobacco being forced to withdraw this advertising campaign.

**Your voice must guide the discussion**

### Critiquing existing research on the topic

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing research in *relation to your topic*?

- Contributions to the topic area
- Limitations in terms of the topic area
- What are the gaps in the research?

You're constructing **an argument** about previous research on the topic

**Critiquing existing research in relation to your topic**

Who did the study?      What did the researchers do? Be appropriately specific      What did the researchers find?

When was it done?      Why was it done?

Smith and Jones (2004) analysed the content of advertisements on New Zealand television during a one week period between the hours of 3pm to 6pm, with the intention of examining the nutritional quality of food in television food advertisements targeted at children. They found that the majority of the food advertisements analysed were for foods that were high in fat, sugars and sodium.

↑  
**Description only**  
Move beyond description into analysis and critique

**Critiquing existing research in relation to your topic**

Smith and Jones (2004) analysed the content of advertisements on New Zealand television during a two year period between the hours of 3pm to 6pm each day, with the intention of examining the nutritional quality of food in television food advertisements targeted at children. They found that the majority of the food advertisements analysed were for foods that were high in fat, sugars and sodium. The study provides a basis for comparing advertising patterns over time. **Contribution** However it does not include any discussion of eating situations or eating behaviour as shown in the advertisements. **Limitation**

- Identify strengths and limitations in relation to your research
- You're constructing an argument about gaps in current knowledge - **your voice** must come through clearly in the review

**Critical evaluation of existing knowledge**

**Methodological critique**

Example:

- Sample size
- Measures used
- Confounding variables
- Validity

See my notes on Writing a Critique

**Existing knowledge on your topic: What do you include?**

**Critical evaluation of existing knowledge**

**Origins and definitions of the topic**

**Theories about the topic**

**Major issues and debates**

**Your Topic**

**Main questions and problems that have been addressed**

**Trends in the research**

(Adapted from Hart, 1998)

*Teacher Burnout: A Study of Occupational Stress and Burnout in New Zealand Schools*

- 2.1. The Nature of Stress
- 2.2. History of the Stress Concept
- 2.3. Main Approaches to Definitions of Stress
- 2.4. The Stimulus Based Definition
- 2.5. The Response Based Definition
- 2.6. Summary of Response and Stimulus Approaches
- 2.7. The Transactional or Interactional Definition of Stress
- 2.8. The Burnout Concept
- 2.9. Defining Burnout
- 2.10. Cherniss's Model of Burnout
- 2.11. Golebiewski's Model of Burnout
- 2.12. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory
- 2.13. Conceptual Framework
- 2.14. Measurement of Burnout
- 2.15. Correlates of Burnout
- 2.16. Studies on Teacher Stress and Burnout
- 2.17. Conclusion

Stress

Burnout

Stress and Burnout

**Origins and definitions of the topic**

Example:

Introduce seminal texts

Provide overview of definitions

In order to study stress in teachers, a clear understanding of what is meant by the term 'stress' is needed...The word stress has become a word commonly used in a variety of settings, with different meanings attached to the situation in which it is used. Selye (1956), one of the pioneers in the field...

There are, however, three general perspectives which have been identified. One is that stress is the result of something outside of the individual, i.e., external factors are the cause of stress. The second is that stress is internal, it is what goes on inside the individual as they interpret or react to what is going on around them (Gold & Roth, 1993); and the third major perspective is the transactional view of Lazarus and colleagues which focuses on the cognitive processes and emotional reactions of individuals to stress in their environment (Lazarus, 1978)

(Adapted from Whitehead, 2001, pp. 12-16)

**Origins and definitions of the topic**

**Phrases for introducing definitions** One of the most publicised definitions (Maslach, 1986), is that burnout is generally conceived to be a chronic response to extreme pressures and involves emotional exhaustion, feelings of low accomplishment and a depersonalisation of others in the work context – a tendency to treat them as objects rather than people...

**Compare definitions** A recent definition... Another distinct definition, by Freudenberger and Richelson (1980), describes burnout in terms of chronic fatigue, depression and frustration typically engendered by commitment to undertaking that did not realise the person's ambitions and expected rewards. Although this conceptualisation incorporates some of the elements of burnout, it is problematical because as O'Driscoll (2000) states, it confounds burnout with variables which are normally considered as distinct from, although related to, burnout, especially depression and chronic fatigue....

**Critique definitions**

**Critique from an academic source**

(Adapted from Whitehead, 2001, pp. 26-27)

**Introducing theoretical models**

**Use original sources** ...Maslach and Jackson (1981) conceptualised burnout as having three core components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and lack of, or reduced, personal accomplishment. Maslach's model of burnout characterises emotional exhaustion as feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Maslach (1998) cites major sources of this exhaustion as work overload and personal conflict at work... Depersonalisation refers to a negative, cynical or excessively detached response to other people, which often includes a loss of idealism... Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in feelings of competence and productivity at work...

**Summarise the information on models using your own words**

**Use appropriate signal words**

**Use sources for overview & critique** The above three-component conceptualisation is the most widely accepted model of burnout (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1996)...

(Adapted from Whitehead, 2001, pp. 27-28)

**Critical evaluation of theoretical models**

**Topic sentence linking paragraph to last section + introducing new point** Despite the popularity of the stimulus approach, the stimulus model is not without its limitations. One is that stimulus events alone may be insufficient when predicting an individual's response. For example, two teachers subjected to loud, noisy classrooms may show quite different levels of strain, or may show strain at different times. Thus it fails to take account of individual differences, and it ignores the perceptual cognitive processes which underpin such differences (Cox & Fergusson, 1991).

**Connecting words and phrases to guide readers** Another criticism of this approach is that...

(Adapted from Whitehead, 2001, p. 16)

**Trends in the research**

**Indication of time period** In the last few decades, research on stress has broadened and become influenced largely by behavioural scientists, moving away from the strict focus on physical stimuli and their physiological consequences (Travers & Cooper, 1996). There has also been a shift of orientation from physical stressors, such as mechanical trauma, toward psychological stressors such as role ambiguity and the impact of psychological and social influences upon the individual...

**Vocabulary used to indicate trends**

(Whitehead, 2001, p. 15)

**Areas of agreement/divergence**

**Correlates of Burnout** Introduce information before going into detail  
Correlates of burnout can be grouped into three major categories: individual (or personal), job, and organisational...

**Individual Level Correlates**  
Demographic variables (such as gender and age) represent examples of variables studied at the individual level. Gender has been frequently investigated as a correlate of burnout, although findings for this variable are varied. Although there are some studies showing that burnout occurs more often among women than among men (Bussing & Perrar, 1991; Maslach & Jackson, 1998b; Poulin & Walter, 1993a), the opposite is also found (Price & Spence, 1994; Van Horn et al., 1997)...

Age is the most consistent factor related to burnout (Birch et al., 1986; Mor & Laliberte, 1984; Poulin & Walter, 1993a)...

**Areas of agreement**

**Job and Organisational Correlates** Provide clear topic sentences & link sections  
Organisational climate has also been seen to contribute to the development of burnout and has received attention from researchers. O'Driscoll and Schubert (1988) found that the lack of communication between organisational levels and influence processes used by managers were strongly related to burnout among social workers, while participation in decision making was associated with reduced levels of burnout. Schultz et al. (1995) also observed that in organisations possessing a 'clan' culture, characterised by teamwork, participation and favourability, employees displayed less burnout because they functioned in favourable work conditions.

Another important organisational variable that has consistently been linked with burnout reduction is social support. Two studies that link social support with burnout reduction...

### Identify gaps in the research

#### Using negative openings:

However, little information	However, few studies
little attention	few investigations
little work	few researchers
little data	few attempts
little research	

#### Using contrastive statements:

The research has tended to focus on..., rather than on...  
However, much of the attention has been focused on X rather than Y.

#### Raising questions, hypotheses or needs

If these results could be confirmed, they would provide strong evidence for...  
It would seem, therefore, that further investigations are needed in order to...

See Manchester University's *Academic Phrasebank* (2006) for more examples:  
Google: manchester university + academic phrasebank

### So...in summarising and evaluating the literature

#### Link the literature to your research topic:

- How has it contributed to existing knowledge on the topic? Which issues does it highlight?
- What are the limitations of its contribution to the topic?
  - strengths, weaknesses, limitations
- How do viewpoints/research findings compare?
  - identify areas of agreement/disagreement/controversy
  - identify trends in the research
- What are the gaps in the existing research?

### Introducing your review

- Establish the importance of your research topic
- Be clear about the purpose of your review
- Tell the reader how the review is structured

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### Introducing your review

#### Be clear about the purpose of your review

- What are you trying to achieve with your review?
  - clear aims in your introduction
- The rest of the review should realise these aims
- Keep going back to these aims
  - helps you to control your research
  - helps you to structure your review
  - helps you to decide what to include

(Adapted from Hart, 1998, p.186)

### Introducing your review

#### Establish the importance of your research topic

Provide *specific evidence* of the importance of the topic

#### Example :

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has become the most widely diagnosed psychiatric condition among children in the United States. Estimates of the percentage of children with ADHD vary from study to study, ranging from two to nine percent, but it is generally accepted to affect five percent of the population under age 18.

(Source: Taylor, 2006, p 1).

**Example:** Point out the number or percentage of people or organisations affected by the problem

### Introducing your review

#### Tell the reader how the review is structured

Sometimes presented as a short paragraph right at the beginning of the Literature Review chapter

#### Example 1:

This chapter begins with a brief description of the nature of stress, the history and present status of stress, and differing perspectives and conceptual approaches. Secondly, the concept and definition of 'burnout' will be reviewed and theories, measures and correlates of burnout presented. Thirdly, there will be a more focused review specifically related to this study, presenting studies of teacher stress and burnout.

Use structural cues throughout the review

## Concluding your review

Come to conclusions about what you found in your review of the literature, leading the reader to:

- your research questions or hypotheses (first hand investigation) or
- a set of recommendations on the topic (review of studies) or
- a new or adapted theoretical model you're proposing (theoretical review)

See: Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007

See: Willemsen & de Zwart, 1999

See: Morrison, 2000

See peer reviewed journal articles for models of literature reviews

## Concluding the review: First hand investigations

Summarise your conclusions on...

- The *overall direction* of work done on the topic so far
- The *gap(s)* in previous work
  - leading your reader logically to your research question(s) or hypothesis(s)

### Example:

The existing content analysis literature provides much information about the quantity of food advertising and the types of foods advertised. Little is known, however, about the food attitudes and behaviours implicit in this advertising and how children might interpret these messages. This study addresses the first of these issues by examining the themes most evident in a sample of food advertisements targeting children.

(Source: Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007, p. 2)

## Deciding which literature is most pertinent to your review

Library searching - Electronic and hard copies:

- university databases
- use **abstracts** to help you in your search
- which authors and articles/books are cited most?
- make an appointment with a librarian for a research consultation

Make sure you follow guidelines in Course Guides for requirements

## Prioritise material type

*Peer reviewed*

1. Articles in refereed, international journals
2. Books / Chapters in Ed. Books
3. Articles in national, refereed journals
4. Conference papers / Research reports (govt, com, org)
5. PhD thesis
6. MA thesis
7. Honours thesis
8. Websites / Articles in non-refereed journals

- Check course requirements
- Consult with your supervisor

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## Presenting information and analysis

A range of formats can be used:

- Text
- Tables
- Diagrams

- Consult with your supervisor on appropriate formats
- See Emerson & Hampton, Chapter 9
- Examine other literature reviews
- Create **templates** according to the requirements of your course
  - presentation and referencing of texts, tables and diagrams
  - in-text references to texts, tables and diagrams

## Help with literature review

- **One-to-one & small group consultations** at Centre for Teaching and Learning
  - Contact details:
  - Email: slc-alb@massey.ac.nz
  - Phone: 414 0800 Ext. 9143
- **DVD presentation: Thesis Toolkit**
  - available from the Centre for Teaching and Learning
- **Excellent text on literature review:**
  - Hart, C. (1998). *Doing a literature review*. London: Sage Publications.

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## Massey's OWLL site

**Academic writing:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing.php>

**Academic writing e-book:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing/academic-writing-e-book.php>

**Assignment planning calculator:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing/assignment-planning-calculator.php>

**Computer skills:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/computer-skills.php>

**Postgraduate assignment types:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/postgraduate-study/postgraduate-assignment-types.php>

**Referencing:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/referencing.php>

**Sample assignments:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/sample-assignments.php>

**Stream and WebCT:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/stream.php>

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