Carrying out your Literature Review or Systematic Review

During your studies you will need to review the literature available for your subject area, assignment topics or final written project. The process of reviewing library resources available is sometimes called the Literature Review and is particularly important when planning and developing your final Thesis or Dissertation.

There are several occasions when you need to carry out a review of available literature:

- When reviewing background literature for your general subject area - i.e. developing a knowledge of the subject by familiarising yourself with available sources and academic works.
- When reviewing available literature and sources for particular assignments, group work, discussions etc.
- When reviewing available literature and sources for your final written project, e.g. Dissertation or Thesis.

Your Literature Review will consist of examining many kinds of sources, including:

- Major search platforms (e.g. Discover).
- Article collections (e.g. Wiley).
- Book platforms (Discover, the Library Catalogue or e-book collections such as Springer).
- Journals (you may wish to identify specific journals for your subject area, then browse or search journals individually).
- Other sources (WWW sources, research portals, newspapers, theses and dissertations, reports and data, legal and official sources, international standards and patents etc.).

The stages of a literature review include:

1. Identifying your topic, research question or areas of interest in conjunction with your assignment or research plan/ proposal.
2. Identifying suitable keywords/ phrases. In some cases terms may be drawn from terminology or acronyms in the surrounding literature (or industry).
3. Identifying search platforms, collections, journals, WWW sites, book publications or other sources to consult.
4. Searching identified sources using defined phrases or keywords (you may also need to use advanced options within search tools, e.g. to limit results within a specific date range).
5. Identify suitable articles, books, theses, data etc. which may contribute to your own knowledge of topic(s) or the research question (if you are conducting a systematic review you may need to identify a number of case studies (see notes on Systematic Review below).
6. Annotate and use referencing software to manage your references (Online students see the Refworks and citation software page also see our LibGuide referencing software page).

Identifying your Topic Areas & Keyword Terms

For any literature review you should try to identify key topics relevant to the study, including any geographical, historical or other contextual factors. In the example below, we consider how to identify topical coverage for researching a dissertation:

- Identify primary topic of our dissertation, e.g. "Information Ethics"
- Sub-topics, e.g. "ethics management", "data protection", "data confidentiality", "Human Resource Management", "HRM".
- Context, region or other circumstances, e.g. "South Africa", "pharmaceutical industry".

When constructing keywords or phrases for searching, you should combine the above topical and contextual terms, e.g. one possible keyword combination developed from the example above could be: "HRM information ethics", you may need to search using a variety of keyword combinations based on your area of study. For additional advice on identifying, evaluating and selecting sources for your Literature Review, and for identifying suitable search phrases please see the guide Searching Tips.

Systematic Review

Doctoral and Masters students will conduct a literature review at key stages of their studies (see above), but may also need to use a more formal literature review process based around case studies, this is often called Systematic Review.

Systematic Review usually consists of developing a search strategy built around topical terms related to the research question, then identifying a number of case studies to evaluate. If you are using a Systematic Review approach for your final written project, this should be defined in your research proposal or methodology. There are a number of Systematic Review models, some of these are shown below. You should follow any special instructions for conducting a Systematic Review provided by your programme of study. Please contact your tutors if you have any questions on the systematic review.

Systematic Review models (mostly health related):

- Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions
• Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre
• PRISMA systematic review model
• Centre for Reviews and Dissemination

Further Help

Please contact your Librarian if you have any questions on your literature review (see list of Liaison Librarians and Librarian for Online Programmes).