



THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Achieving International Excellence

Module 1: Defining the field (Outcomes 1, 2 3)

Introduction to the unit

- Unit overview and relation to previous unit
- Assessment criteria

Research design: developing a conceptual framework

Relation to Previous Unit

EDUC9970 Develop a First Draft Proposal

Select a topic

Develop a proposal

Identify central research question

Identify a number of sub questions

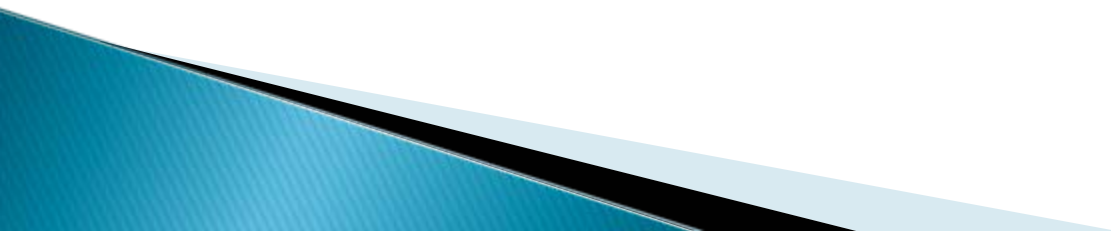
Support rationale with initial literature review

EDUC9970 Advanced Studies in Education (Lit. Review)

Conceptual framework

Contextual background

Empirical research



RESEARCH PROPOSAL WRITING

Introduction

In this session we will look at how to select your topic, how to formulate a set of research questions and how to draft a research proposal. Ethical issues will also be addressed.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this first phase, you should be able to:

identify a researchable topic;

frame a set of research questions and understand the difference between general, specific and data collection questions;

draft a detailed research proposal;

identify and understand the issues involved in securing consent to conduct your study and arranging access to your study site(s) or sources.

Schedule

Part 1: Selecting a research topic

Part 2: Formulating a research question

Part 3: Drafting the research proposal

Part 4: Identifying ethical considerations and gaining consent

Part 1 Selecting a research topic

- How do you identify a researchable topic?
- Start by writing down your responses to the following questions:
- What areas of education do I personally find interesting?
- What issues do I come across in my work that are problematic?
- What level am I interested in researching e.g., primary, secondary, tertiary?
- Am I interested in students, teachers, or management?
- Am I interested in a particular subject area or a particular innovation?
- Am I interested in exploring gender or ethnicity issues?
- Do I want to focus on individual or group differences?

Look at your responses to the points above and see if you can identify two or three topics that you think might be interesting. Write them down.

An example

Following is an example of how one person might approach choosing a topic based on this approach.

- What areas do I personally find interesting?

Maths education,

- What issues do I come across that are problematic?

Children having problems with fractions, I think children rely on calculators too much in class,

- What level am I interested in researching e.g., primary, secondary, tertiary?

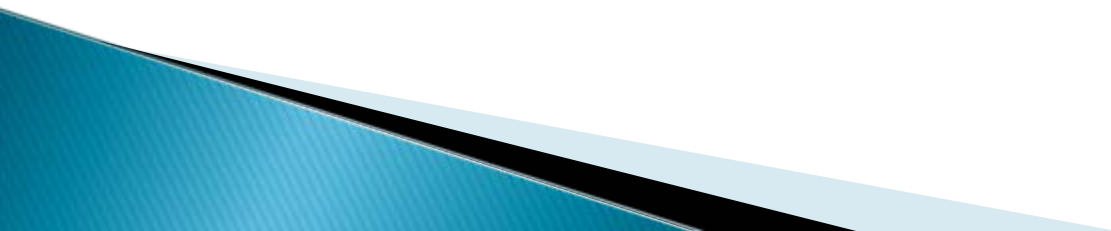
Primary school,

- Am I interested in students, teachers, or management?

Students,

- Am I interested in a particular subject area or a particular innovation?

Maths,

- Am I interested in exploring gender or ethnicity issues?
- 

Girls seem to have more problems with fractions than boys. Boys use calculators and computers too much and don't understand what they are doing - but still perform better on tests.

- Do I want to focus on individual or group differences?

Individuals – don't really mind.

In this example, the student might choose their possible topics as:

1. Primary school aged girls and boys ability to do fractions.
2. Primary school aged boys use of calculators or computers in maths.
3. Curriculum policy regarding the use of technology in maths

The role of research questions in the development of your research proposal:

In using the simplified model of research described in Punch (1998:41) the model stresses:

- framing the research in terms of questions;
- determining what data are necessary to answer those questions;
- designing research to collect and analyse those data;
- using the data to answer those questions.

An approach you can use to help clarify your thinking about your topic and questions is the “What, How and Why?” approach.

Let’s apply the “What, How and Why?” approach to your topic.

What?

“What?” questions will help you to clarify your topic.

- What is my research about?
- What is the purpose of my research?
- What am I trying to find out or achieve?
- What questions am I trying to answer?
- What do I want to find out?

How?

- “How?” questions will help you to work out the data that you will need to collect.
- How will my research answer these questions?
- How will I find out the answers to my questions?

Why?

“Why?” questions will help you to clarify the importance or significance of your topic.

- Why is this research worth doing?
- What is the significance and contribution of my research?

My topic

Write out the topic that you want to look at in your project.

Part 2 Formulating a research question

The advantages of using research questions in the development of your research proposal are that they should do the following five things:

- help to organise the project;
- delimit the project showing its boundaries;
- keep the researcher focused during the project;
- provide a framework for writing up the project;
- point to the data that will be needed.

The “What?” section of the “What, How and Why?” approach above will have raised some possible research questions for you. However, you need to understand the difference between the three different levels of questions that are used in designing research. These are:

- general research questions which guide our thinking and are of great value in organising the project but they are not specific enough to be answerable;
- specific research questions are questions which follow on from the general research questions and direct the study and they are able to be answered in the research;
- data collection questions are questions which are used in the collection of the data and these may appear on a questionnaire, survey or interview schedule. These questions are developed last.

General research questions

As we noted above, these need to be quite broad but able to guide your research. Examples of some general research questions are:

What are the attributes of a good teacher?

What do teachers mean when they say they have a 'good' class?

Why do boys perform better on multiple choice tests than girls?

Research questions may be framed from various perspectives. For example:

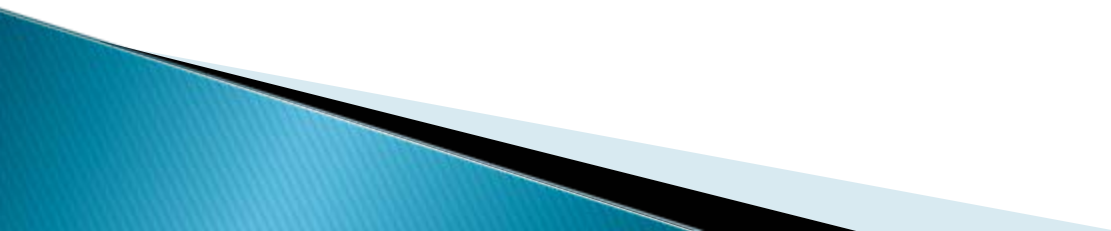
According to parents what are the attributes of a good teacher?

According to teachers what are the attributes of a good teacher?

According to students what are the attributes of a good teacher?

Other ways of framing general research questions may be “From the perspective of...” or “In the perception of”

Now write down some general research questions for your topic.



Specific research questions

As we noted above, these need to be subsets of the general research questions. They are the specific questions that your study will answer.

Examples of some specific research questions are:

How do grade three girls attempt to solve problems that involve addition and subtraction of fractions?

How do grade three boys attempt to solve problems that involve addition and subtraction of fractions?

Are there any differences in their approaches? If so, what are the differences?

Now write down some specific research questions for your topic.: (1, 2, 3 and 4)

Checklist

Following is a checklist of the features of good research questions. Check your questions against them. Are your questions:

	Yes	No
Clear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Answerable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interconnected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A model for research design

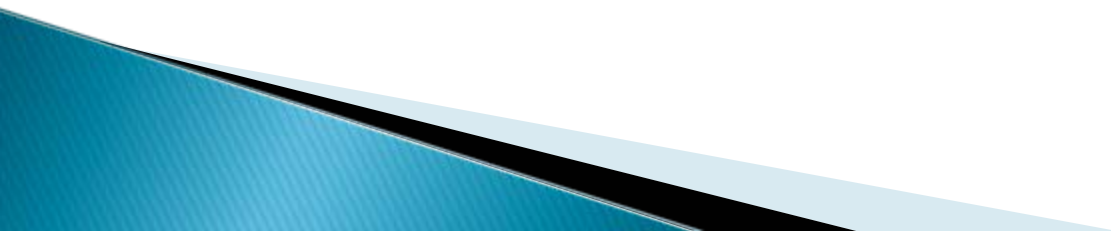
A research design should describe the content of the research process and the form in which it will be undertaken. It should include aspects such as: the strategies you will follow to collect data; the framework to which the strategies belong; and how, where, when and under what conditions you will collect and analyse the data. Treat the design as a way of *preparing* the study and *getting ready* to collect the data. A good design should contain the following:

The research question

Describe the research question and how it was formulated. What factors influenced your choice of topic? These factors might include, for example, financial restrictions, time, availability of assistants and experts, methodology, politics and personalities, and the need for data. How did you develop the research question from the research topic? That is, how did you 'prepare' the topic in order to be approached methodologically?

The methodology to be employed

Define and outline clearly the type of methodology that will guide the research project. Justify your choice of methodological framework, and discuss how this choice will affect the direction, structure and process of the whole project.



Who and what is to be studied

Describe the main dimensions of the study, including the key factors and variables. What is the presumed relationship among key factors and variables? Will the whole population or a sample be studied? If a sample is preferred, which sampling procedure is most suitable and why? Justify the sample size.

The proposed place and time of research

Where will the study take place? How long will it take? When will key events happen? Does the proposed schedule allow for flexibility?

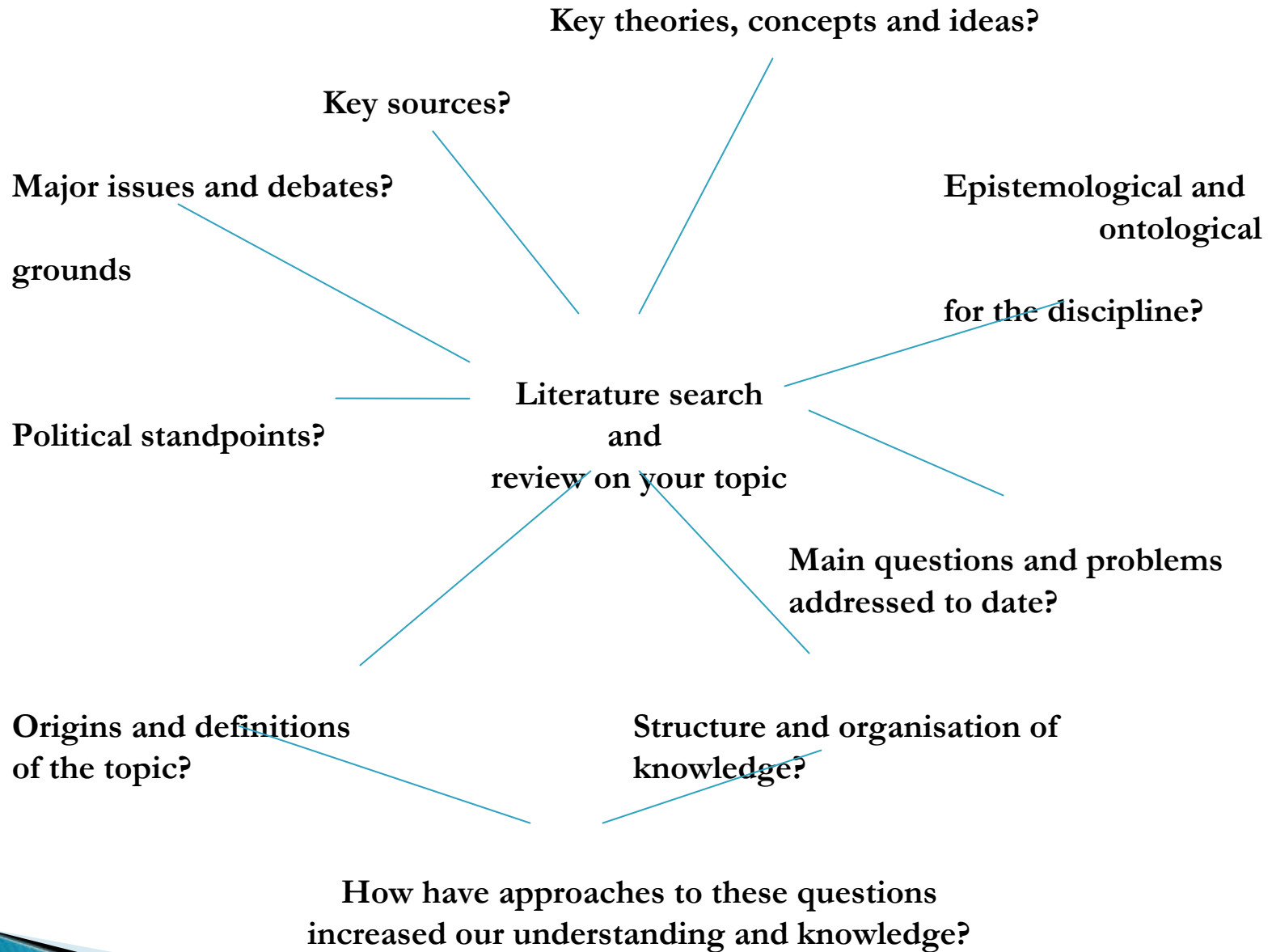
The methods of data collection and analysis

Describe the number and nature of the specific methods of data collection to be employed, and their suitability for the study. Explain the factors influencing your choice, which might include research objective, nature of the research topic and resources, for example. How will you manage and record the data? Describe too the proposed methods of data analysis, and how these relate to the methodological framework underlying the study and the methods of data collection.

Module 2: Contextualising the study (Outcomes 2, 4)

What is contextual literature?

- background
- context
- discourse



Social discourses

Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes...Another way to look at Discourses is that they are ways of displaying membership in a particular social group or social network. (Gee 1990, p. 142-43)

- Discourses might also be used as tools for definition of self:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal that one is playing a socially meaningful role. (Gee, 1990, p. 143)

Gee's 1994 definition suggested that Discourses were sets of parameters which pre-existed the displays or actions which allowed people to demonstrate membership of particular groups:

Discourses are) sociohistorical coordinations of people, objects ('props'), ways of talking, acting, interacting, thinking, valuing, and (sometimes) writing and reading *that allow for the display and recognition of socially significant identities*, like being a (certain sort of) African-American, boardroom executive, feminist lawyer, street-gang member, theoretical physicist...and so on through innumerable possibilities. (Gee, 1994, p. 33. Emphasis applied)

- From Gee, it seems that Discourses not only construct the ways in which members of a group perceive the world (and texts), but that, as Ferdman (1990) suggests, displays of those Discourse features which identify the group are required to maintain active membership of the group.
- More simply, social discourses are the ways we have of talking about phenomena in the world.
- Thus, we both construct meanings about the world through discourses, but are, at the same time, constructed as meaning makers by the discourses we use.

Context and discourse

What is the context of the study?

What is the prevailing discourse within which the study is 'located'?

What are the parameters of the discourse?

What are the themes and gaps in the discourse?

Are there competing discourses in the literature?

Organising framework

Description and uses

Chronological order

In temporal order based on publication dates. Especially good for tracing the developing of an issue, concept or theory.

General to specific

Information about the broadest issue is presented first, followed by research that deals with more narrow aspects of the issue.

Contrast-comparison

Research that is similar is separated into sections to highlight differences among the various studies.

Trend identification

Research is separated into identifiable trends. Trends are placed in order of importance to the study.

Methodological focus

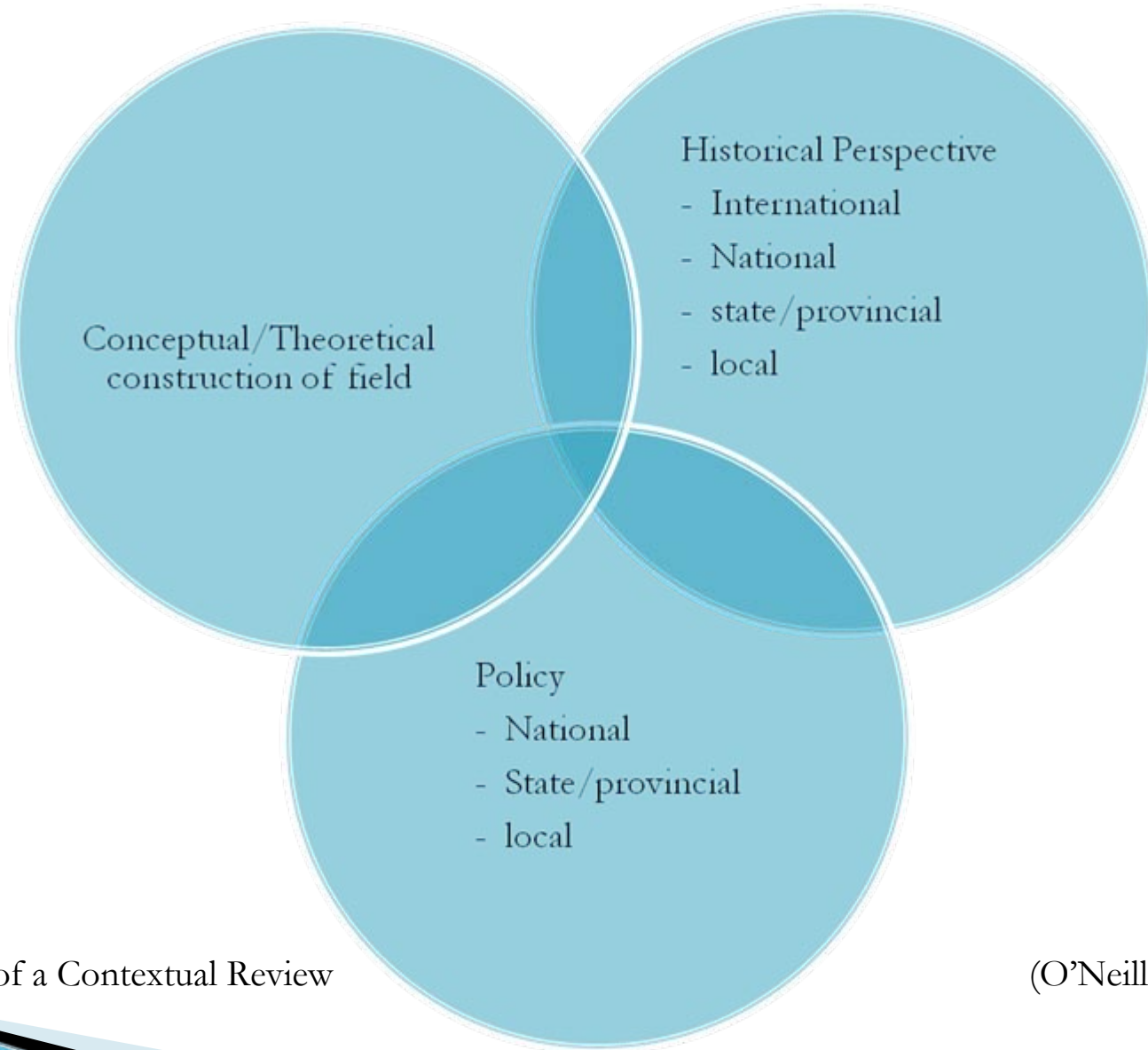
Studies using the same methodology are grouped together and compared to other methodologies

Problem–case-solution

Description of the problem is followed by description of its cause and suggestion of a solution.

Topical order

All information about a topic is presented in separate sections. Topics are introduced sequentially in order of importance or in order of appearance in research questions or hypotheses.



Elements of a Contextual Review

(O'Neill, 2001)

Module 3: Writing an empirical literature review (Outcomes 5, 7)

What is empirical literature?

Purpose of an empirical literature review



Questions to ask

Using the question-based approach used in the preceding sections and to guide you in developing a topic write down your responses to the following questions:

What prompts you to conduct this literature review?

What is the topic?

Why are you interested in this topic?

What are the leading issues of contention?

What are the major debates about the topic?

What key concepts will need to be explained or defined?

What is the significance of the topic at present?

Who has written in this area?

What are the major works that are relevant and applicable?

How is knowledge on the topic structured and organised?

In what context (historical, political, social, economic) did these works emerge?

Can the major texts be sourced? – Where are they likely to be?

Are other sources of information identifiable in the bibliographies in the major texts? Where can these sources be located?

Are differing points of view discernible in the texts sourced? How do they differ?

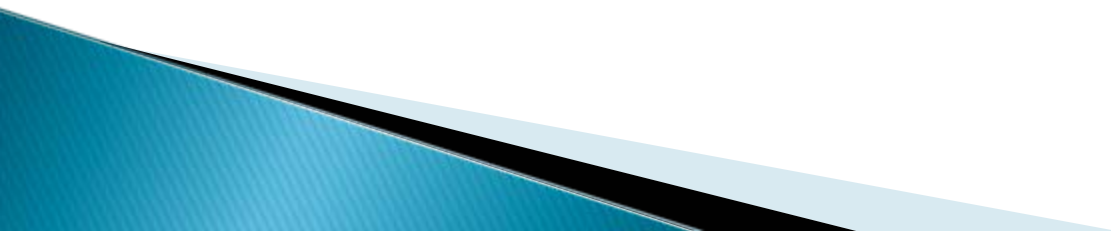
What are the points at issue?

Is there any common ground?

Whose arguments stand up best with the benefit of hindsight?

What remains to be done?

What key question(s) still needs to be addressed?



Doing a Literature Review

Recommended text: Hart, C. (1998) *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social science Imagination*. London: Sage.

Definition

The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.

Hart, p. 13.

Purposes

1. Distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done
2. Discovering important variables relevant to the topic
3. Synthesising and gaining a new perspective
4. Identifying relationships between ideas and practice
5. Establishing the context of a topic or a problem
6. Rationalising the significance of a problem
7. Enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary
8. Understanding the structure of the subject
9. Relating ideas and theory to applications
10. Identifying the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used
11. Placing the research in an historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments

Hart, p. 27.

Module 4: The role of the literature review (Outcomes 3, 4, 7)

Making use of the literature

- Knowledge based elements
- Argumentational based elements

Writing a Literature Review

Your review needs to be structured as an argument, to achieve at least the following:

Knowledge based elements

- 1.a description of the previous work on the topic, identifying leading concepts, definitions and theories.
- 2.Consideration of the ways in which definitions were developed and operationalised as solutions to problems seen in previous work.
- 3.Identification and description of matters other researchers have considered important.

Argumentational based elements

- 1.a description of what you find limited or deficient in previous work on the topic.
- 2.a proposal for action that might solve the problem – your research.
- 3.an explanation of the benefits that might result from adopting the proposal.
- 4.a refutation of possible objections to the proposal.

Resources

- 1.the relevant discourse including alternative definitions of key terms and concepts.
- 2.summaries of the methodological arguments found in key texts.
- 3.your assessments of how key definitions and methodological assumptions have been operationalised.

Possible structures for your argument (Hart, p.188)

Problem-awareness pattern (summative evaluation)	Cause and effect pattern (analytical evaluation)	Possible solution pattern (formative evaluation)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the nature of the problem: give examples, showing extent offer evidence problem exists develop definition of problem. • Show relevance of problem to reader: provide specific evidence or argument of negative effects. • Explain consequences if nothing is done, or current state continues: provide evidence of effects of current practice summarise the problem situation. Outline the parameters of the problem (definitional argument). • Outline and approach (recommendations) for tackling the problem situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish existence of problem: propose possible causes; show main factors underpinning the proposed causes. • Clarify any confusing areas: eliminate improbable, irrelevant causes; provide evidence for causes eliminated. • Focus attention on proposed cause/definition: provide evidence for proposed cause/definition; summarise the argument. • Suggest course of action (recommendations) to deal with the problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider definitions and solutions already tried: give relevant examples of solutions already tried; show why they failed or were inadequate; show factors causing failure; provide evidence of factors. • Consider possible alternatives: distinguish between alternatives; provide summary of possible effects of alternatives; make a choice from alternatives by elimination; provide evidence for elimination and choice. • Summarise the problem, solutions tried and why they failed, and give recommendations for alternative approaches.

Notes on Literature Review

1. What is it?

The literature review is a bridge between your research idea and a body of knowledge, information, concepts and theories which already exists in a relevant broader field.

2. What is the aim of the literature review?

According to Swales & Feak (1994) it is part of the creation of a research space - a process which enables the reader to ascertain that you are aware of work already done as well as gaps that still exist. The process also helps you to pinpoint the location of your research in one or another (or several) broad fields of enquiry and thus to show how and where it contributes to knowledge.

3. What are the stages of preparing an informative literature review?

The stages can be seen as follows:

[i] Searches Library etc

[ii] Wide reading This phase involves reading with two main objectives:

(a) Locating your research in broader fields e.g. Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Cross Cultural Communication, TESOL etc. Review articles, introductory chapters in symposium volumes, historical accounts of broad fields are good sources for achieving this objective;

and

(b) Finding out what research has been done in related or partially related areas. For example if your idea is to study the development of writing skills in a second language (L2) at primary school level in Australia, then you might also want to read research reports on work done on the development of writing skills in a first language (L1) at secondary level in a country where a language other than English (a LOTE) is the dominant language. This will give you an opportunity to gain a comparative perspective on your topic.

[iii] Grouping and reorganisation of your reading notes

Finding commonalities and themes which run through several research papers. Find the links which bind the groupings you have developed.

Check each set of your notes for relevance. When you find that a note or set of notes is not relevant to your discussion, do not hesitate to discard it (put it in storage in case you find relevance at a later stage).

[iv] Where does the literature review fit in?

A literature review may eventually come after an introductory chapter or chapters which state the background, the context and aims of the study. However, there seem to be no hard and fast rules as to the timeline when you should actually prepare it. In fact, a literature review requires several cycles of revisiting. The final form usually takes shape only once all the other chapters have been finalised.

[v] Editing Principles for editing can be based on the following questions:

Does each section connect with the preceding and following section?

Does each paragraph connect with each preceding and following paragraph?

Does each sentence connect with each preceding and following paragraph?

Remember that a literature review is NOT a list of items you had read separately but a COHERENT text in which every part contributes to the coherence of the full text.

Finally check that citations conform to internationally recognised standards.

References: Swales, J.M. & Feak, C.B. (1994) Academic Writing for Graduate Students: a course for non-native speakers of English. Ann Arbor, Michigan: U.Mich.Press.

General functions of a literature review

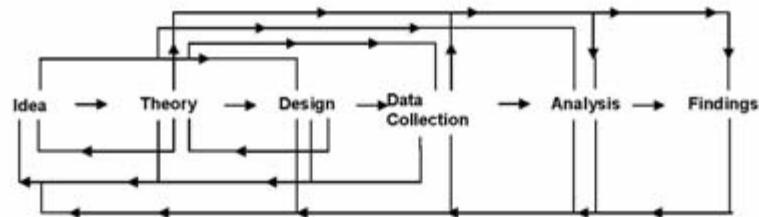
Theory-before-research



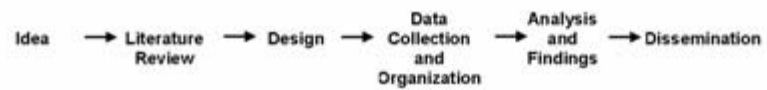
Research-before-theory



The research enterprise



Locating the literature review



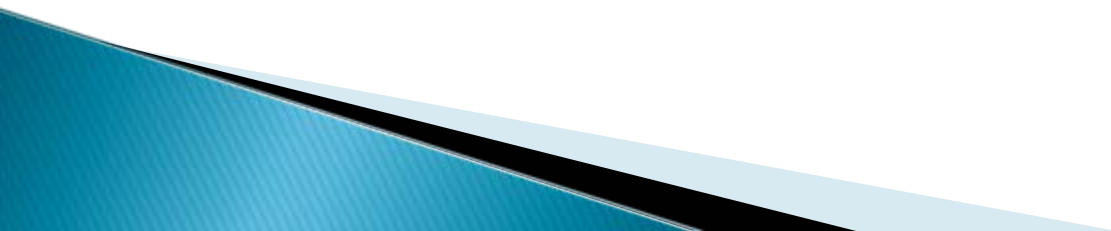
Module 5: Taking a critical perspective (Outcomes 2, 5, 6, 7)

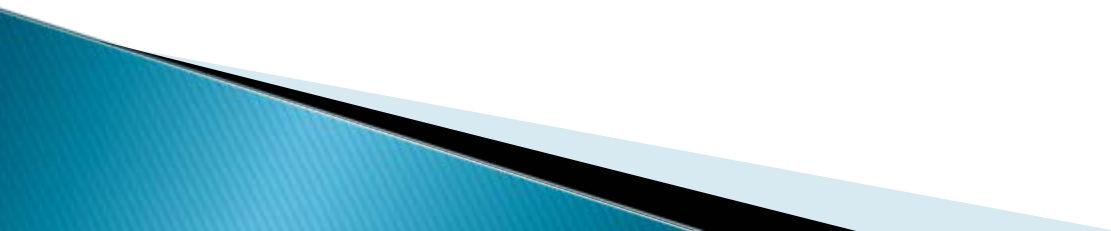
What is criticism?

- Writing a critical literature review
- Formulating a 'critical attitude'

Library workshop: locating the literature

Critical review: levels of analysis

1. Has the author formulated a problem/issue?
 2. Is it clearly defined? Is its significance (scope, severity, relevance) clearly established?
 3. Could the problem have been approached more effectively from another perspective?
 4. What is the author's research orientation (eg interpretive, critical science, combination)?
 5. What is the author's theoretical framework (eg psychological, developmental, feminist)?
 6. What is the relationship between the theoretical and research perspectives?
 7. Has the author evaluated the literature relevant to the problem/issue? Does the author include literature taking positions she or he does not agree with?
 8. In a research study, how good are the basic components of the study design (eg population, intervention, outcome)? How accurate and valid are the measurements? Is the analysis of the data accurate and relevant to the research question? Are the conclusions validly based upon the data and analysis?
- 

9. In material written for a popular readership, does the author use appeals to emotion, one-sided examples, or rhetorically-charged language and tone? Is there an objective basis to the reasoning, or is the author merely 'proving' what he or she already believes?
 10. How does the author structure the argument? Can you 'deconstruct' the flow of the argument to see whether or where it breaks down logically (eg in establishing cause-effect relationships)?
 11. In what ways does this book or article contribute to our understanding of the problem under study, and in what ways it is useful for practice? What are the strengths and limitations?
 12. How does this book or article relate to the specific thesis or question I am developing?
- 

What is criticism?

- A critical attitude should be taken in your review:
- agreeing with or defending a position, or confirming its usefulness through an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses
- conceding that an existing approach or point of view has some merits which can be useful, but that others need to be rejected
- focusing on ideas, theories and arguments and not on the author of those arguments, so as to produce careful, considered and justified evaluation
- being aware of your own critical stance; identifying the reasons for selecting the work you have criticised and recognising the weaknesses in your critique
- selecting elements from existing arguments and reformulating them to form a synthesis: a new point of view on some subject matter
- finding fault in an argument by identifying fallacies, inadequacies, lack of evidence or lack of plausibility
- identifying errors in a criticism made by another to provide correction and balanced criticism, thereby advocating the usefulness of the original work and reasons for rejecting the criticism made of it.

Conducting a document or archival search

Locating the sources

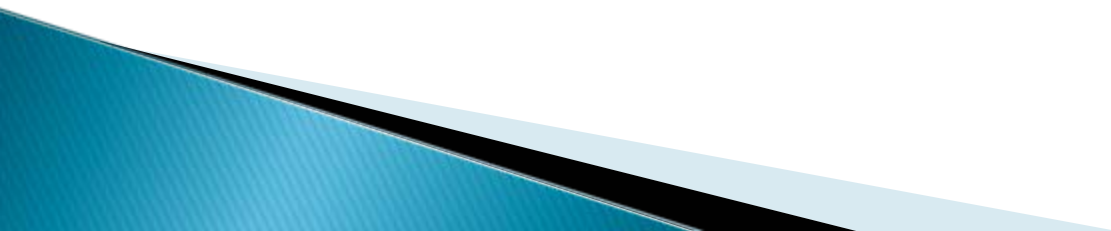
In this section we look at the range of documentary material and texts that may be sourced. Aside from conventional paper print text, sources may include visual and electronic formats, and artistic works and artifacts.

Finnegan (1996) provides the following useful summary of types of sources:

1. Standard and official sources

- i. works of reference ie: Whitaker's *Almanac* and *Year Books*
- ii. government reports and parliamentary papers
- iii. statistical records – census
- iv. annual and special reports
- v. parliamentary debates
- vi. documents on foreign policy

2. Cabinet and government documents

- i. cabinet records
 - ii. government documents
 - iii. private papers of politicians
- 

3. Memoirs, diaries and biographies

- i. biographies and autobiographies
- ii. diaries
- iii. memoirs

4. Letters and contemporary writing

- i. current affairs – works by journalists and social scientists
- ii. social surveys and opinion polls
- iii. novels, plays and poetry
- iv. newspapers and periodicals

5. Images sound and objects

- i. Film
- ii. photographs, maps and pictures
- iii. sound and video recordings
- iv. interviews
- v. museums and contents
- vi. history on the ground – townscapes and landscapes and aerial photographs

6. Computerised records

- i. computer data bases
- 

Assessing the sources

Analysis of documents

You will need to consider the following issues once you have located relevant documents:

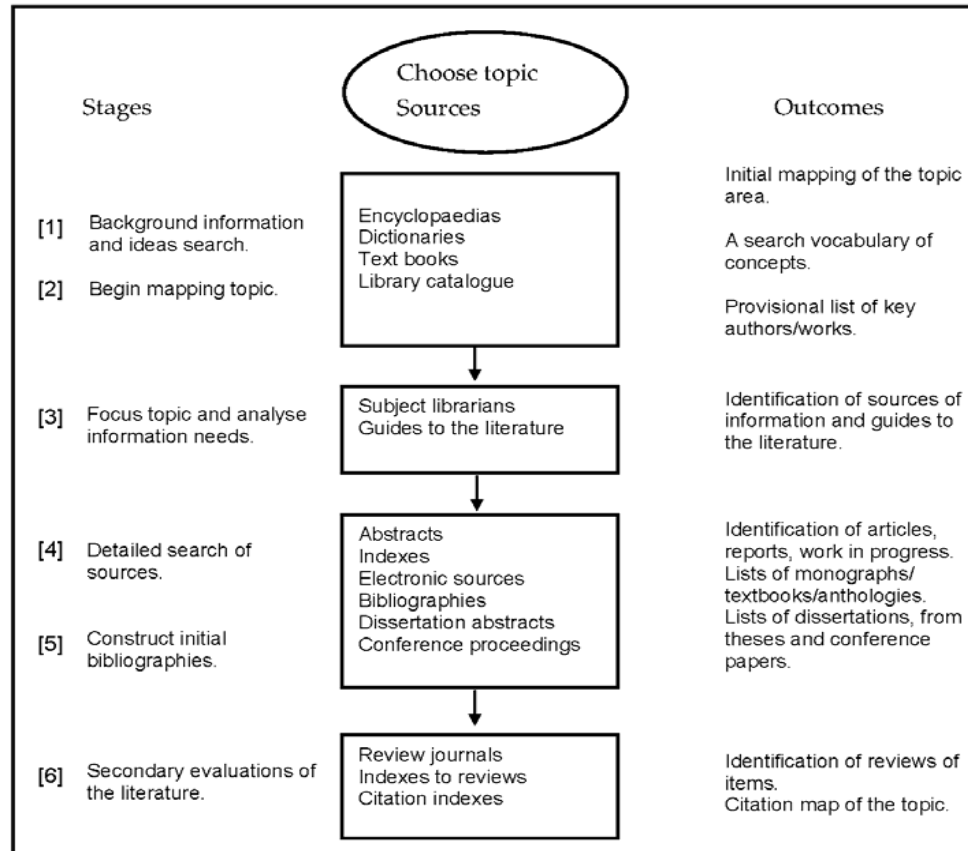
- i. On what basis did you select the sources?
- ii. What is the authenticity of the document?
- iii. How representative are the documents of what is available ie: How far does the source which describes a particular incident or case reflect the general situation?
- iv. Is the source concerned with recommendations, ideals, or what might be done?
- v. How credible is the document/ author?
- vi. What is the meaning of the document? – intended, received and content

Questions to ask

1. What type of document is it?
2. What does it actually say?
3. Who produced it?
4. What do you know about the author?
5. When and in what circumstances was it produced?
6. How did the document come in to existence?
7. Is it typical or exceptional of its type?
8. Is it complete?
9. Has it been 'altered' or edited?
10. How long after the 'event' was the document produced?

Library Workshop

Complete each of the following stages to develop an outline of your literature review assignment. This involves locating and assembling literature in specific subject-based research areas of your thesis topic.



Organise the literature identified as relevant to your topic in a logical manner, showing the inter-relationship between the major components and sub components.

Develop an initial outline of the assignment, in the form of headings with dot points, including complete references of relevant literature to be reviewed in each section.

Using library and computer resources

CygNET Online

CygNET Online is the UWA Library's gateway to information resources held within the Library and around the world. You can access CygNET Online at:

<http://www.library.uwa.edu.au/>

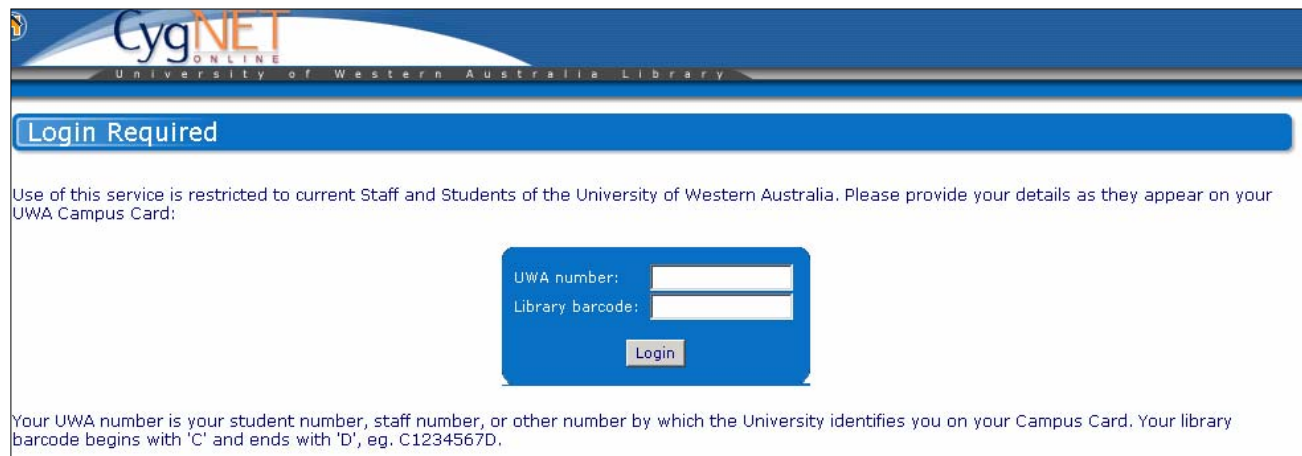
You do not need a special password to access most CygNET resources. Some of the CygNET resources that are available on the World Wide Web that can be accessed using your Internet provider include:

- the UWA Library Catalogue
- the catalogues of other libraries
- the Information Toolbox (an introductory list of electronic and Internet resources arranged by subject area)
- an email reference service
- online information skills courses
- information about the UWA Library
- World Wide Web search engines

Resources for UWA Students

License agreements require that we restrict access to some CygNET resources to UWA staff and students. You can access most of these resources using the information on your UWA Campus Card. Contact a Reference Librarian in the EDFAA Library if you have difficulty accessing any CygNET resources.

When you attempt to access any resource restricted to UWA staff and students, the following screen will appear:



The screenshot shows the CygNET ONLINE interface for the University of Western Australia Library. At the top, the logo reads "CygNET ONLINE" with "University of Western Australia Library" underneath. A blue banner below the logo says "Login Required". Below the banner, a message states: "Use of this service is restricted to current Staff and Students of the University of Western Australia. Please provide your details as they appear on your UWA Campus Card:". In the center, there is a blue login form with two input fields: "UWA number:" and "Library barcode:". Below these fields is a "Login" button. At the bottom of the form, a note explains: "Your UWA number is your student number, staff number, or other number by which the University identifies you on your Campus Card. Your library barcode begins with 'C' and ends with 'D', eg. C1234567D."

Once you enter your UWA student number and your UWA Campus Card barcode number, you will be able to access these resources.

Some Useful Electronic Resources

- **ERIC**

ERIC is a US database that indexes North American and international Education journals as well as papers known as *ERIC Documents*. To access *ERIC*, do a title search in the UWA Library Catalogue for *ERIC Online* and then select *Connect to this title*.

- **Australian Education Index**

Australian Education Index indexes Australian Education journals, conference papers, and theses. To access *Australian Education Index*, do a title search in the UWA Library Catalogue for *Australian Education Index* and then select *Connect to this title*.

- **ProQuest Education Complete**

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