**Teaching and Learning Centre podcasts: the DISSERTATION SERIES**

**Reviewing the literature: a text and a process – KEY POINTS**

The literature review section of your dissertation is a clear, logical, narrative that you craft, using the existing ideas and debates around your research area, to frame and lead up to your own specific research question(s).

**The “jobs” of a literature review**

* Your literature review synthesises the main ideas relevant to your particular research question and presents them in an organised way.
* It offers a critical analysis of this information, discussing not only what is known about your topic, but also what is not yet well understood.
* The literature review should also show advantages and limitations of different points of view that you survey, which can reveal areas of controversy.
* The literature review provides a framework for your research-a context for your study.
* By giving a synthesis of prior research and the existing understanding about your topic, the literature review shows where your research questions and your study fit in to the bigger picture and how they are relevant.
* This way, it clarifies the link between your study and previous work, and also motivates your current study.

**The process of reviewing the literature**

* Reviewing the literature and writing this section of your dissertation is a cyclical process. As you explore the literature, you’ll discover aspects of your topic that you might not have been aware of before. As you read (and write!) further, you’ll be better able to narrow the focus of your research and develop a clearer idea of the potential questions you can concentrate on.
* Write regularly, even daily! Draft parts of literature review as you go along.
* Acquire / brush up on your information literacy skills; become familiar with using the research tools used in your discipline. For one-to-one research and information skills training, see your Academic Support Librarian at the LSE Library.
* Share and discuss your drafts with your supervisor, other teachers, and your peers.

**Literature review pitfalls to avoid**

* A weak literature review reads like a descriptive text, sometimes even a list of what various authors “say”, with no narrative, no guiding concept.
* A lack of reflection on strengths and weaknesses of the various explanations, models, theories makes for a weak literature review
* Literature reviews that are limited only to readings assigned on the course will likely be considered narrow, basic, and lacking in independent reading and originality.
* Be sure that the ideas that you develop in your literature review are linked to the rest of the work in your dissertation.

**Further reading about literature reviews**

Feak C. & Swales J. (2009) Telling a Research Story: Writing a Literature Review. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Hart C. (1998) Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Imagination. London:

SAGE.

Ridley, D. (2008) The literature review: a step-by-step guide for students London: Sage

Royal Literary Fund: www.rlf.org.uk/resources/what-is-a-literature-review