

What is it?

In the literature review you highlighted the problem that needs 'fixing'. The theoretical framework is the 'toolbox' you use. It details the theories, propositions, hypotheses (if you're using them) and concepts - the 'tools' - that you will use to address or make sense of this problem.

What should you avoid?

- Avoid combining theories that share different epistemological or ontological underpinnings.
- Avoid writing or introducing your theory framework descriptively. Always be critical.
- Read first hand material and avoid other people's reviews of theories where possible.
- Don't rely too heavily on quotes. Your examiner wants to see that you can understand the theory.
- Avoid claiming that your theory is perfect or 100% reliable. It won't be and you should acknowledge its limitations.

Notes:

What should it include?

The job of a theoretical framework chapter is to discuss in detail what the tools look like, how they behave, how they have been used before, how they relate to one another, how they are relevant to your aims and objectives and what the drawbacks are from using them.

The key when writing your theoretical framework is to show your understanding of the broad theoretical school and to define the key concepts, both with reference to the existing literature, but also to your research questions and problem statement. Make sure you have covered the following:

1. You need to have a solid grasp of your aims and objectives. These define the space in which your research will sit and your goals when conducting it. You will need to briefly recap these when you start writing your theoretical framework, both to remind the reader and so that you can relate your theory to these overarching aims.
2. Critically explain the theory/theories you are using.
3. Critically argue why you are adopting this particular theory/combination of theories.
4. Can the theory/theories be broken down into different schools? Explain the one you are siding with and why.
5. A theory contains a number of concepts. Explain those that you will be drawing upon and clearly define them. Outline any hypotheses you use.
6. Explain your epistemological and ontological position, and how it influences the way in which you use and apply theory.
7. Have you explained how the concepts/hypotheses relate to your aims and objectives?
8. Are you the first to use this particular theory in this particular way? Explain the benefits and drawbacks that this brings.
9. Explain the drawbacks of applying this theory.

How can you make it great?

- When discussing the theory/theories you are using, define and explain each theory you draw upon and, in doing so, discuss the leading proponents and applications. This shows that you understand the theory you are going to adopt.
- When discussing why you are adopting a particular theory/combination of theories, There are a lot of potential theories you could use. Why this one? Importantly, you should relate your choice to the discussions in the literature review and your aims and objectives.
- Explain how the concepts are related to to one another, whether in the form of models or hypotheses.

How does it relate to other chapters?

The theoretical framework is a natural extension of the literature review. The purpose of the literature review, amongst other things, is to highlight gaps and shortcomings with the existing work in your field. The theoretical framework details the perspective you will take to address those gaps and shortcomings.

