**Critically Reviewing Literature**

**1. What is a critical literature review, and why is it important?**

A critical literature review is a comprehensive examination and assessment of existing research on a specific topic. It goes beyond summarising articles and instead aims to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and inconsistencies within a body of work. This process is crucial for researchers to demonstrate their knowledge, identify research gaps, generate specific research questions, position their own research within the existing literature, and contribute to theory development.

**2. How do I go beyond summarising articles in my literature review?**

Avoid creating a series of article summaries. Instead, identify common themes, concepts, or issues within your chosen topic. Once you've categorised your articles, write about each category as a whole, analysing and comparing the arguments, findings, and methodologies presented within that specific group.

**3. How can I effectively find research gaps in my literature review?**

Actively search for gaps while reading prior research. These can manifest as unexplored areas, outdated studies requiring re-evaluation due to recent developments, or explicit calls for future research by authors. Note these gaps and discuss their significance in advancing knowledge.

**4. How do I demonstrate the relevance of my research in the literature review?**

Position your research by identifying the ongoing conversations and debates within your field. Explain which conversation your research aims to join, how it addresses existing limitations or gaps, and how it contributes to the broader understanding of the topic. Cite relevant authors and studies to showcase your work's position within the current research landscape.

**5. What are the key stages involved in conducting a literature review?**

The three main stages of a literature review are:

* **Assembling:** Identifying and retrieving relevant articles through systematic searches in databases, reference lists, and academic networks.
* **Arranging:** Organising and summarising the literature based on categories, themes, or chronological developments. Tools like summary tables can be particularly helpful in this stage.
* **Assessing:** Critically evaluate the quality and value of the literature by identifying strengths, weaknesses, inconsistencies, and opportunities for future research.

**6. What are some practical tips for writing a strong literature review?**

* **Start strong:** Write an engaging introduction that defines key concepts, justifies the topic's importance, outlines the review's scope (what will and won't be covered), and clearly states your research question.
* **Use summary statements:** Instead of lengthy article summaries, employ concise summary statements that synthesise findings and arguments from multiple articles within a specific category.
* **Showcase your organisation:** Use headings, subheadings, tables, and figures to present a clear structure and visually represent the relationships between different categories within your literature review.

**7. How do I ensure my evaluation of the literature is critical?**

Don't just describe; critically analyse. Point out both strengths and weaknesses in the existing research. Question the methodologies, consistency of definitions, potential biases, and generalizability of findings. Offer constructive criticism and suggest improvements or alternative perspectives.

**8. What should I do after I finish writing my literature review?**

Review and revise! Ensure your arguments are clear, your evidence is well-supported, and your writing is concise and engaging. Seek feedback from peers and mentors to gain different perspectives and refine your work before submitting it.