Using a Matrix to organise your notes for faster writing
www.thesiswhisperer.com

This exercise is adapted from a post on Literaturereviewhq.com, based on an idea published on mystudiouslife. Wordpress.com.

A matrix helps you to organise your notes in a format that is easy to translate directly into your chapter draft. The idea is to identify themes you want to write about first so that you can read more purposefully and distill from the articles only what you need. You may find you think up more themes as you write. The table below is fictional, just to help you get the idea.

Themes in research about PhD students	Humbug et al (2009)	Mewburn (2012)	Whathisname (2013)
Reasons for undertaking a higher degree	Argues that this varies by discipline	Argues that there is a clear gender division in the discipline enrolments - but older people less so.	Doesn't mention this – many people don't actually. Is this a problem with the literature?
Completion rates.	Shows that men drop out more than women in almost all disciplines.	Shows that older people who are enrolled part time are more persistent than those who enrol part time	Shows that attrition varies by institution and that the 'richer' institutions lose less students
Social learning in PhD student communities	Doesn't mention this	Shows examples of conversations to show that older people have more complex discussions about 'meta' issues in PhD study than younger students	Suggests the community in richer institutions is better than that in poorer institutions.
Relationships with supervisor - how important is it?	Argues that the relationship with supervisor is a key determinant of success	Argues that older people deal with poor supervision better than younger people	Suggests that poorer institutions have a 'younger' supervisor profile

Examples of paragraphs that could be generated from this matrix:

"We can better understand problems like attrition if we know why people choose to undertake a PhD in the first place, however scholars do not pay attention to the reasons why students are motivated to enroll in a PhD. Two notable exceptions are Humbug et al (2009) and Mewburn (2012). Humbug et al noted that different disciplines report very different reasons for beginning a PhD. Mewburn further developed this work in her studies of older students, claiming that gender further complicated the picture of motivation."

"Does supervision play a role in PhD student attrition? There is no clear evidence one way or the other, although many scholars claim it is crucial. Humbug et al (2009), who surveyed students about their PhD experience, argues that the relationship with the supervisor is a key determinant in the decision to leave PhD study, whereas Mewburn (2012) argues that older students are better able to deal with poor supervision. The culture of supervision in a faculty or Academic Unit and even its wealth (Whathisname, 2013) might impact on the attrition patterns of PhD students."