

BA-Eindwerkstuk Seminar

Week 3: Conducting a Literature Review

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Today's Agenda

1. Review of Week 2 and roundtable
2. Purpose of a literature review
3. Types of literature reviews
4. Reflect: what kind of review will you write?
5. Best practices for searching, reading, and writing
6. Example: a working paper on national identity in Taiwan
7. Exercise: annotated bibliography and draft outline

Review from Week 2

Roundtable: Your Question, Motivation, and Data

Each of you, briefly share:

1. **Your research question** (one sentence)
2. **Your motivation** — why does this matter? What is the problem or gap? (2–3 sentences)
3. **Your data** — what type of data do you have, plan to collect, or think you might need? (1-3 sentences)

Recall: The Question, Problem, and Analysis

Three things you should be able to state clearly in your introduction/revised proposal:

1. **What is your question?**
2. **What is your problem?** (the gap or puzzle in the existing literature)
3. **What are your sources, and how will you analyze them?**

Today we focus on #2: how the literature review helps you *define* and *justify* your research problem.

What Is a Literature Review?

Purpose of a Literature Review

A literature review is **not** a summary of everything you have read.

It is a *critical analysis* of existing scholarship that:

- **Situates your research in context:** Shows how your study extends, refines, or challenges existing work.
- **Identifies gaps in knowledge:** Reveals contradictions, unresolved questions, or overlooked areas in prior studies.
- **Motivates empirical strategies:** Shows what methods and empirical strategies are available and (sometimes) why these should be adjusted.
- **Establishes credibility and relevance:** Demonstrates you have built upon a recognized foundation of scholarship.

The Lit Review in Your Thesis

1. **Introduction** — question, motivation, overview
2. **Literature Review** ← *you are here*
 - Situate the question in existing scholarship
 - Identify the gap your thesis addresses
 - Build toward your analytical framework
3. **Methodology / Analytical Framework**
4. **Findings**
5. **Discussion and Conclusion**

Key Point

The lit review is the bridge between your question and your method. It tells the reader *why* your question matters and *how* others have approached similar problems.

Types of Literature Reviews

Argumentative Review

- **Purpose:** Critically examine a body of literature to support or refute an existing argument or assumption.
- **Approach:** Selectively include sources to develop a stance or “contrarian” viewpoint.
- **Watch out for:** Potential bias—argumentative reviews can overemphasize sources that favor one side.

Integrative Review

- **Purpose:** Summarize and synthesize past research to generate new perspectives.
- **Approach:** Include all relevant studies addressing the same research question or hypothesis.
- **Key value:** Creates or refines frameworks and theories.

Most common type in the social sciences.

Historical Review

- **Purpose:** Trace the chronological development of a theory, concept, or issue.
- **Approach:** Identify how a topic or scholarly conversation evolved through time.
- **Key value:** Provides historical context and identifies trends or turning points to inform future research.

Methodological Review

- **Purpose:** Focus on research methods rather than findings.
- **Approach:** Compare how studies collect and analyze data, exposing strengths, weaknesses, or patterns.
- **Key value:** Highlights new approaches, ethical considerations, and overlooked techniques in the field.

Systematic Review

- **Purpose:** Provide a comprehensive and unbiased summary of all available evidence on a focused research question.
- **Approach:** Follows predetermined, transparent criteria to search, evaluate, and synthesize existing research.
- **Typical in:** Clinical and health-related fields, but increasingly adopted in the social sciences.

Theoretical Review

- **Purpose:** Examine how theory or theories have evolved to explain a phenomenon.
- **Approach:** Explore existing conceptual frameworks; identify gaps or inconsistencies; propose new hypotheses.
- **Key value:** Helps establish the theoretical basis for your own study and points to directions for further research.

Types of Literature Reviews (Recap)

1. **Argumentative Review:** Support or refute an existing argument; watch for bias.
2. **Integrative Review:** Summarize and synthesize past research to propose new perspectives.
3. **Historical Review:** Trace the evolution of theories or topics over time.
4. **Methodological Review:** Focus on methods and approaches used, not just findings.
5. **Systematic Review:** Formal, exhaustive search with strict criteria; common in clinical/social sciences.
6. **Theoretical Review:** Examine how theories emerge and interrelate in your field.

You will mix and match depending on your question, sources, and methods.

Reflect

What About You?

- What is your “literature”?
- What kind of sources will you read?
- What kind of review(s) will you do?

Break

10 minutes

Best Practices

Preparation

- **Clarify your research question:** Understand your main goal and how it fits existing studies.
- **Conduct targeted searches:** Use library databases, journal indexes, citation tracking, and curated bibliographies. Make good use of bibliographies of representative studies!
- **Collect and organize sources:** Gather essential studies (the “must-reads”) and categorize them thematically or chronologically. Work back from these.

Organization

- **Chronological Structure:** Good if developments clearly follow a timeline, but not always necessary.
- **Thematic (Conceptual) Structure:** Group studies by themes, subtopics, or shared concepts.
- **Methodological Structure:** Compare/contrast research designs, samples, and data analysis techniques.
- **Combination Approach:** Often, reviews combine two or more structures (e.g., chronological then thematic).

Reading

- **Summarize and evaluate:** Go beyond summarizing results; critique scope, evidence, and limitations.
- **Keep an annotated bibliography:** Include short, critical summaries and keywords for each source.
- **Track conceptual links:** Visual connections using digital or physical tools (tables, mind maps).
- **Manage references:** Use citation software (**Zotero**, Mendeley, EndNote) for organization.

Writing Tips

- **Integrate primary and secondary sources:** Bring in direct evidence where relevant, but maintain focus on *analyzing prior work*.
- **Look for patterns or consensus:** Determine convergences among studies, noting the main points of agreement.
- **Note conflicting perspectives:** Highlight where scholars disagree; show why it matters to your project.
- **Revisit and refine:** Reevaluate your sources and add new references as your own study evolves.

Example

Example: National Identity in Taiwan

Paper: “Measuring National Identity with Conjoint Experiments: The Case of Taiwan” (Denney, Steinhardt, and Qi, working paper)

Question: How should we measure national identity? Can conjoint designs reveal trade-offs and priorities that conventional surveys miss?

Problem: Standard survey batteries (e.g., the ISSP) ask people to rate identity criteria one at a time in observational fashion. This limits the inferences we can derive from this measurement strategy and the data coming from it.

How the Lit Review Is Structured

The review is organized **thematically**, with each theme building toward the research gap:

1. **National identity as multidimensional** — Establishes that scholars have long distinguished among different dimensions of identity (Kohn, Smith, Shulman, Bonikowski).
2. **Democracy and national identity** — Reviews theory arguing democracy and nationalism are intertwined (Nodia, Greenfeld, Linz); connects this to the Taiwan case.
3. **Limitations of existing measurement** — Critiques the ISSP battery: ceiling effects, no trade-offs, treats dimensions as independent. *This is the gap.*
4. **Methods solution** — Proposes an alternative method (the conjoint) and explains why it addresses the gap.

What Makes This Lit Review Work?

- **It is thematic, not source-by-source.** The review is organized around ideas, not a list of “Scholar A says X, Scholar B says Y.”
- **Each theme serves a purpose.** Theme 1 establishes the concept. Theme 2 develops the theory. Theme 3 identifies the gap. Theme 4 motivates the method.
- **It builds an argument.** By the end of the review, the reader understands *why* the study is needed.
- **It mixes review types.** Integrative (synthesizing identity scholarship) + methodological (critiquing how identity has been measured) + theoretical (connecting democracy and nationalism).

A Simple Template

You can use a similar structure for your thesis:

1. **What is known?** — Summarize the key scholarship on your topic.
2. **What is debated or unresolved?** — Identify disagreements, gaps, or limitations in prior work.
3. **What is missing?** — State the specific gap your research addresses.
4. **How will you fill it?** — Preview your approach (this leads into your methodology chapter).

Remember

The literature review is not a separate chapter that exists on its own. It connects your question to your method. Every source you include should earn its place.

Exercise & Next Steps

Exercise

Generate an annotated bibliography* and a draft outline of the literature review.

Due to Brightspace by 23:59 on February 26 (Thursday).

You should use this in your revised proposal.

***Min. of 5 sources with the following annotations:**

1. *Full Citation:* Provide the complete reference (Chicago Style) so readers can locate the source easily.
2. *Summary of Main Ideas:* Briefly outline the source's central argument(s), key findings, or themes (~2 sentences).
3. *Relevance or Evaluation:* Note the source's strengths, weaknesses, or importance for your research topic, indicating how it is connected to the research question (~2 sentences).

Looking Ahead

Week 4: Analysis and Reporting – Empirical Strategies for Data Interpretation

- Overview of analysis methods: qualitative and quantitative
- Structuring the findings section
- Connecting findings to the research question and literature review

Key Dates:

- Assignment #1 due: March 13, 2026
- Start thinking about your supervisor and schedule a meeting

Course Website

https://scdenney.github.io/baks_thesis-seminar/

Resources

USC Library's overview of literature review types:

<https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/literaturereview>

Grant, Maria J., and Andrew Booth. "A Typology of Reviews: An Analysis of 14 Review Types and Associated Methodologies." *Health Information & Libraries Journal* 26, no. 2 (2009): 91–108.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-1842.2009.00848.x>

Leiden University 'Subject guide'* on a systematic literature review:

<https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/subject-guides/systematic-reviews>

* Many different resources are found in the university's subject guides!