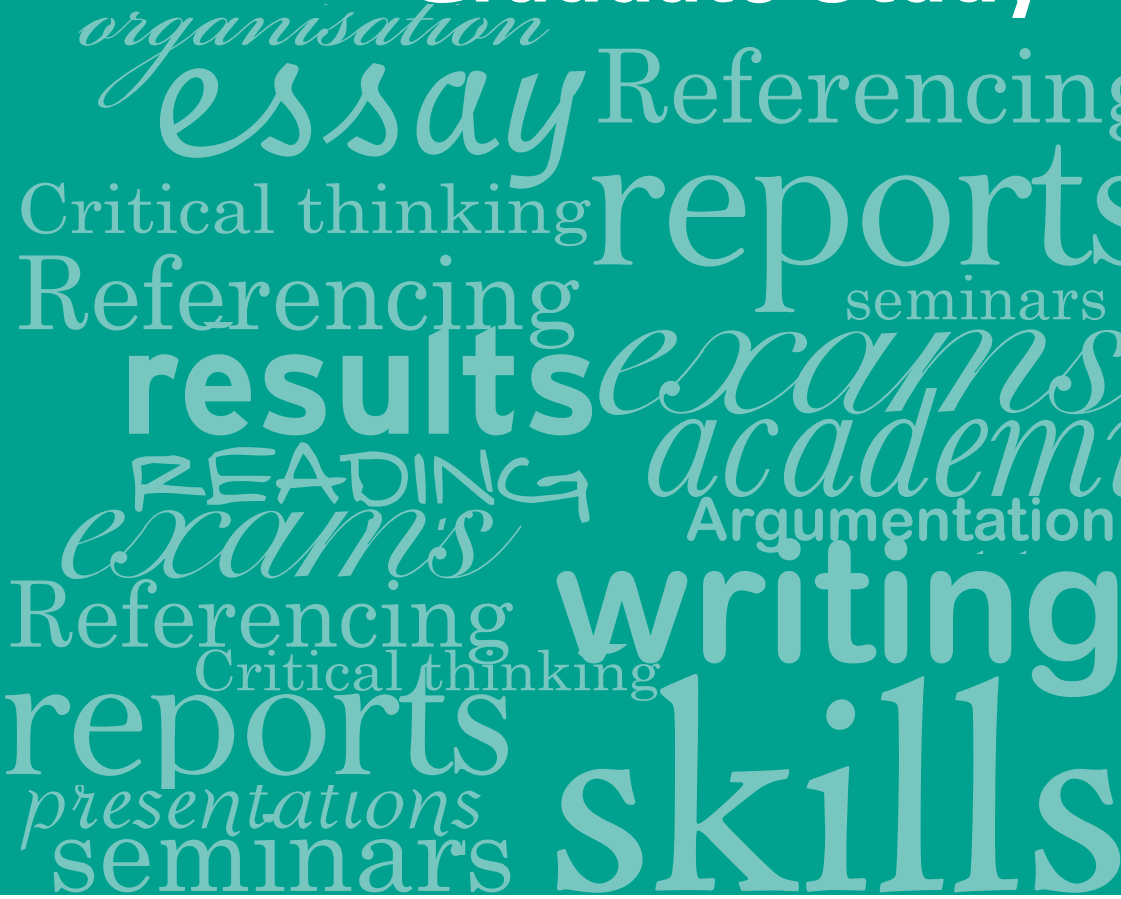
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

ACADEMIC SKILLS UNIT

Managing Graduate Study



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MANAGING GRADUATE STUDY

Congratulations on choosing to study at graduate (grad) level. Whether you are coming into your grad study from a successful undergraduate program or from the workplace, you will already have developed many effective learning techniques as well as research and writing skills. These techniques and skills stand you in good stead for your grad work. However, you may also find that your new study experiences are somewhat different to the experiences you've had before. If you are coming from ugrad study, for example, you will notice that the quantity and depth of work you are now expected to produce is significantly higher than at undergraduate level. Those of you coming via the workforce may find that there are different demands compared to your professional experiences.

Whether your grad degree is via research or coursework, the sheer volume of the material you will be handling requires a high level of management and organisation. That's where this booklet can help. It offers information and advice, and points you in the direction of other resources regarding successful graduate study.

Remember that you can consult advisers at the ASU (Academic Skills Unit) or GSA (University of Melbourne Graduate Students Association) throughout your candidature or course, and that the Melbourne School of Graduate Research (MSGR)) provides many useful resources and courses.

1. THE NATURE OF GRADUATE WORK

Most graduate students find that the nature and volume of their work is more demanding than previously experienced. There is a need to be more critical and more analytical. You need to be able to delve into topics in depth, to develop and express complex, sustained theories and arguments. These expectations are both challenging and exciting; however, the process can also be intimidating at the outset.

To really immerse yourself in your grad studies whilst still attending to the rest of your life (family, work, social and leisure activities are all important too) you will need to call on, and further develop, all of your previous time and project management experience.

As semesters are relatively short, coursework students have to master course content very quickly. Research students have longer to read about their topic, but must develop greater depth of knowledge while working independently. For both groups it is important to prepare a realistic timetable and get going early. Planning a timetable for completion of tasks helps to develop good study routines and take advantage of your beginning-of-degree enthusiasm.

STARTING OUT: WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

- **Ensure you have a dedicated, comfortable, private and ergonomically-sound work place. Consider lighting, storage, internet access and equipment needs. Can you sit and work at your workstation comfortably for several hours?**
- **Develop a balanced work week which includes leisure as well as study, work and family commitments.**
- **Establish long, medium and short-term goals to help keep you on track and monitor your progress.**

- **Talk with your lecturers/supervisors: clarify expectations of each other and discuss ways you can work together most effectively.**
- **Clarify the administrative tasks required of you as a graduate student – what forms, reports or papers must you complete?**
- **Know your rights and the services to which you are entitled from both the University and your department.**

Grad work can be isolating. Whether you are completing coursework or a major research project, plan to avoid the common graduate pitfall of feeling disconnected and alone.

AVOID ISOLATION: GET INVOLVED IN UNIVERSITY LIFE

- **Get together with a group of other graduate students for regular meetings to share ideas, academic discussions, progress or problems, or to present work-in-progress in a supportive environment.**
- **Find a 'thesis buddy' – a student working at a similar stage in a similar discipline who can provide study support and companionship.**
- **Attend departmental and graduate seminars organised by your department or school. Consider also attending seminars run by other departments and at other tertiary institutions.**
- **Participate in conferences and GSA and MSGR events.**
- **Volunteer to assist with a graduate journal or the activities of a professional association.**
- **Join in departmental and graduate social events.**

2. TIME MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION STRATEGIES

One of the most challenging aspects of grad study is the expectation that you will work independently and be responsible for your own progress. To do this successfully, a combination of dedication and good work practices is required. In particular, good time management is essential.

SEE THE BIG PICTURE

Depending on which course you are studying, the 'big picture' will differ. Time management issues for Masters by coursework candidates differ to those writing a minor thesis, and differ again for those doing a PhD. The process, however, has similarities:

- **List all of the items that need to be done, in order for you to complete your studies.**
- **Determine the order that these will need to be conducted in.**
- **Allocate the length of time they might take (always plan to spend about twice what you initially think sounds right!).**

For example, a 3-year PhD timeline may initially look like the following one. If you are undertaking a PhD, you can fill in your own dates in the right hand column.

Time into candidature	Progress/requirements	Date
0 months	Offer of probationary PhD candidature Accept and enrol at Melbourne School of Graduate Research	
8 months	Confirmation report form sent to candidate by MSGR	
9-11 months	Candidate submits a substantial report to their supervisor(s) and presents this report before their Confirmation Committee	
11-12 months	Confirmation report form submitted to MSGR with signatures of candidate, supervisor and chair of the Confirmation Committee	
12 months	Candidature confirmed	
2 years	Annual progress report completed and submitted to MSGR	
2 yrs, 9 months	80 word summary submitted to MSGR; Nomination of examiners by Head of Department	
3 years	3 copies of thesis submitted to MSGR in temporary binding with 'Statement of Supervisor' form	

The basic outline is a good starting point, from which you can start to add more detail. Whatever form of higher degree you are undertaking, make an early appointment with your supervisor or course adviser. Discuss the major tasks that need to be undertaken and the estimated time frames for these. When would you be expected to have completed your basic research and/or literature review? When would you be expected to have a first draft? How long should you allow for revision and editing? This creates a working timetable that identifies when you are required to complete each component or section of work.

ORGANISE A WEEKLY TIMETABLE

Once you have an overall picture of what you need to achieve by certain stages of your candidature, you can work out what you need to get done in a given semester. Then you need to develop a weekly program to help you complete the necessary tasks.

When preparing a weekly timetable, be sure to allow time for all university, work, social and household commitments. Try to schedule your academic activities at your best working times – are you a morning person, an afternoon person, or a night owl? If you usually suffer a mid-afternoon slump in concentration, for example, it wouldn't be effective to write at this time of day. Perhaps use this time to meet friends or to do household chores.

Consider the concentration levels required for different academic activities when you are scheduling them. You really don't need to be at your brightest when photocopying articles or checking references. However, reading articles or writing a first draft requires peak concentration.

The great advantage of using a detailed timetable is that it allows you to plan your time use, rather than letting events take you over or just responding to crises as they arise. It keeps you focused on the tasks you need to complete to reach your goals and enables you to monitor and evaluate your progress. Be warned, however. At the beginning, you are likely to overestimate what you can get done in a given week. Don't throw your timetable out the window when this happens. Instead, revise your plan – what is realistic for you to get done this week? Where can you make more time or use time more efficiently? Recognise, too, that circumstances and demands often change and that a good timetable is flexible.

'Publish' your timetable such that it's visible to the significant people in your life (partner, children, supervisor etc)- this may help others to identify the best (and worst) times to interrupt you.

DEVELOP A LIST HABIT

Create a daily 'to-do' list of tasks – preferably the night before. This will avoid the great time-waster of not knowing where to start. For your list to be useful, all items must be specific, measurable and able to be done within a reasonably short time frame. For example, 'Work on literature review' is too broad. Where would you start? How would you know when the task was 'done'? By contrast, 'Read three articles' or 'Complete section on methodology differences' are specific and finite – you know where to start and when you will be finished.

A daily to-do list – an example:

- Find Harrington reference in library – borrow or photocopy
- Read and take notes on 2 Naffine and Stagnetti articles
- Draft section for chapter 4 comparing Threadgold's approach with Townsend's
- Buy a new USB stick
- Enter articles read yesterday onto EndNote
- Ring dentist
- Supermarket shopping

*__Note:__ when writing the list, ensure that you've taken into account the amount of time you need to complete each of the tasks on your list. Is this really one day's work? Then, based on the type of work, your best concentration times and other commitments, plan your day.

As with weekly timetables, be aware that to-do lists need regular revision. If you are not getting through all the items on your list, acknowledge the tasks you have completed, then restructure the other tasks to make them more manageable. Some things may have to be carried over to the next day; other tasks can be postponed or even dumped. Ticking items off your list should help provide motivation, or at least give you confidence that you're moving forward!

3. EFFECTIVE READING

For both research and coursework students, reading takes up a significant amount of time throughout your candidature. There may not be time to read and take detailed notes on everything and you need to think carefully about prioritising. It is also imperative that you read as *effectively* as possible. This may mean breaking habits that duplicate work and avoiding lengthy re-reading of material. Here are some pointers to help you read as efficiently and effectively as possible.

READING FOR MAXIMUM EFFECT

Beware of this trap: reading for hours, only to finally raise your head and think 'well that was interesting but I don't think I can use it'. Indiscriminate reading can waste days and even weeks of your candidature, leaving you frustrated and none the wiser. The good news is that you won't fall into this trap if you understand your purpose for reading, have a focus while reading and develop good 'pre-reading' habits.

Understand your purpose

All reading should be done for a specific purpose. Before you start reading, think about this: Are you scanning for particular facts or skimming to establish an understanding of the author's general argument? Are you analysing the evidence put forward by a particular study or deconstructing the assumptions underpinning a certain line of argument?

To read efficiently, be aware of your purpose and tailor your reading and note-taking to the task required. If you are reading for background or preparing for a tutorial, you can read more quickly than if you want to write about the author's evidence. Skimming the introduction, conclusion and opening sentences of each paragraph may be enough – at least to establish whether this text is useful to you and, hence, justifies more detailed attention.

Of course, if you need to write a critical evaluation of the text, you will need to slow your reading pace, check your understanding regularly and read all examples and details. In other words, your purpose should determine how you read and you should not be reading all material in the same way.

Have a focus

Your reading will be more focused if you ask yourself: 'What do I expect to learn from this passage/chapter/article?' If you have *specific* questions in mind before you begin to read, you are more likely to actively engage with the text by looking for answers and making connections. Your tutorial and lecture guides may provide questions to ask of your readings. If not, they will indicate the critical issues on which to focus and you can develop your own questions from these.

Pre-reading

Pre-reading is a set of activities that gives you an overview or outline of the material in a text before you start to read line by line. The great benefit of pre-reading is that it improves comprehension and understanding. It also helps you to identify which information is relevant to your purpose and, thus, requires more detailed reading.

Some strategies to pre-read an article:

- **Note the title and date – is this article current?**
- **Look at the structure – how many sections are there? How are they arranged?**
- **Read the abstract – note the article's aims and the author's methodology.**
- **Read the introductory paragraph – how will the article and the argument proceed?**
- **Look at major and minor headings – what is being prioritised here?**
- **Look at diagrams, graphs, charts and any illustrations.**
- **Read the conclusion – are the findings relevant to your topic or line of inquiry?**
- **Read the first sentence in each paragraph (often the topic sentence containing the main point of the paragraph).**
- **Look at the references – what school of thought does this author seem to be aligned with? Which authorities do they appear to rely on?**

To pre-read a book, all the points above will apply and you can also make use of the table of contents and the index.

UNDERSTANDING COMPLEX TEXTS

You may need to read a complex text more than once if it is going to feature in your written work. Take careful notes each time to ensure that you're getting more information out of each re-read (not just re-reading because you've forgotten what was there!).

If you are having difficulty understanding a required text after previewing the text as described above, try reading the easiest sections first. Once you have a sense of what they are about and how the text proceeds, go back to the more difficult sections and read slowly. Try to identify the author's argument or main points paragraph by paragraph. Think about how what you have read furthers the argument or relates to the main focus of the text. Distinguish between the points being made and the illustrations, examples or evidence put forward to support these.

If the theoretical perspectives or key concepts are unfamiliar, you may first need to read a more basic text that deals with these directly. If you are still unsure, consult your tutor, supervisor or other graduate students in the department.

In addition to keeping notes on the information in the text, jot down thoughts and resources that helped you to understand the material. These may be important steps/breakthroughs that you need to direct your readers to, once you write up your own work: for example, "Diagram in Smith et al. was really clear" or "Needed to understand basics of X before Y made sense".

4. EFFECTIVE NOTE-TAKING

Taking copious notes that you don't end up using, or taking too few notes so that you have to go back to the library and hunt down the reference again, can waste precious study time. Effective note-taking is a very useful skill, and one that can usually be further developed by students at all levels. At graduate level particularly, you are likely to sink in a sea of paper and information unless you have efficient and reliable note-taking strategies.

Some ideas for using your computer to streamline your note-taking:

- **Type your references up (for example, in EndNote) at the end of each study session.**
- **Save your favourite bibliography searches to avoid having to retype them.**
- **Cut and paste references and quotes from email or web searches straight into computer files.**
- **Avoid retyping handwritten notes by taking notes directly onto the computer. *EndNote* has space for this with every library entry and not only keeps everything organised but enables you to electronically search your notes.**

As with reading, be aware that your purpose should determine the kind of notes you take. If you are reading texts in preparation for a tutorial, brief summaries (2-3 sentences) of each reference should be sufficient. If you are reading to prepare for an essay, you need to write more detailed notes on the relevant section of the article or chapter.

Some tips to help you take effective notes – efficiently:

- **Keep a pen in hand at all times when reading.**
- **Keep all notes on a text on the same page(s), clearly headed with the author, title and publication details.**
- **After pre-reading the text, write a sentence summarising the topic of the text and the main argument.**
- **Note down the questions you want the text to answer – and whether it does!**
- **Take notes in your own words. This aids concentration and is a step towards writing up later.**
- **Avoid highlighting and underlining instead of taking notes (assumes you will re-read). Supplement highlighting or underlining with your own notes, comments and questions in the margin of a photocopy.**
- **Do not rewrite notes to make them neater (do something active with the material instead – summarise or paraphrase it, for example).**
- **Paraphrase and summarise rather than copy out long quotations.**
- **Make notes of your responses and criticisms as you read – this will help generate arguments later.**
- **If you think something may be useful later, make a note of it now and a note of what you thought you might do with it.**
- **Be meticulous in copying quotes you want to use and be sure you can differentiate between quotes, paraphrased or summarised sections, and your own comments or ideas.**
- **Keep track of your references as you go and ensure all notes pages are clearly labelled.**

Remember that your assessment tasks examine your ability to analyse and contribute to the literature in your field. Your results depend on your ability to review, comment, critique and argue (rather than your ability to summarise or reproduce facts). If your note-taking strategies are focused on these critical skills, it is much easier to turn your notes into the kind of writing expected at graduate level.

5. WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

Clear and effective notes in your own words, and jottings of your own critical ideas, are a step towards a first draft of any essay, assignment, chapter or report. When you are ready to start writing, your notes should ideally form the basis of your first draft.

The next step is to translate your reading and analyses into an academic discussion. Remember, your work has no significance until it is successfully communicated to others. As well as a confident grasp of the subject material, to communicate successfully you need the ability to express yourself in written, academic English. You also need an understanding of the common elements of the academic genre in which you are expected to write (for example, report, exegesis, essay, thesis, discussion paper, synopsis and so on.)

Commonly, one of the first pieces of writing you are required to produce as part of your graduate research is a literature review. A literature review is a critical discussion and assessment of the existing materials dealing with research and knowledge in a given field. While the length and complexity of a literature review varies depending on the context and scope of your research, literature reviews have common purposes, features and functions. Understanding these makes the process of writing a literature review much easier.

PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of a critical review is to demonstrate that the writer has extensively researched the literature and critically evaluated its quality. This is an essential step in larger research projects for a number of reasons.

The literature review…

- **sets up the theoretical framework for and contextualises your own research**
- **helps you to make use of and extend others' work and, most importantly, avoid their mistakes**
- **helps you find your own 'research space', ensuring your unique contribution and limiting unnecessary duplication**
- **demonstrates your understanding of key concepts, studies and questions.**

A well-written literature review gains and focuses your reader's attention on the issues or questions you want to investigate. Consider how effectively the following opening to a literature review achieves this:

> *Of the many who have looked at the relationship between age and performance in universities none has as yet produced a definite answer to the apparently simple question 'Do mature age students do better or worse than younger students?'*
>
> (Woodly 1985 as quoted in Bell 1999, p.93).

Anyone who reads this sentence is tempted to read on: What is the relationship between age and performance in universities? Why haven't previous researchers been able to answer this question? Does the current research supply the missing 'definitive answer'?

A literature review should help the reader involve themselves with your research problem by explaining not only the topic of your investigation but also what has been done before and the contribution your own project makes. In short, it provides reasons and a framework for reading the subsequent data and discussion.

To achieve this, it is not enough to describe what others have discovered. You need to view their work with your own insight. An effective review presents, analyses and synthesises material from a range of sources. It then concludes with a working hypothesis – a tentative explanation that you will go on to explore and test – not an answer.

COMMON PROBLEMS AND PRACTICAL TIPS

To write a literature review you need to find, and read, a wide range of literature about the topic. Begin taking notes as soon as you begin reading about your topic area – note any thoughts or ideas that might help in developing a broad plan and their appropriateness to different sections of the review. Here are some tips on locating and selecting literature, keeping track of references and reading critically.

Locating the literature

The first step towards writing a good literature review is a comprehensive literature search. Access a wide range of the available literature in your area. Remember that the *age* of material is important. Generally references should be up-to-date research. Start with the seminal reference everyone else quotes, and use bibliographies and reference lists from this and other major texts to direct you to more sources.

Methods of locating literature include: library catalogues (both on and off campus), relevant CD-ROM databases, online library searches, library links on the web and other WWW resources. Librarians are a wonderful source of assistance and a wealth of information when starting your research. Sign up for an information session on searching current library information systems if you are returning to study after a break.

Selecting the literature to review

When you start a literature review, it's normal to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of material on any given topic. As well as reading actively, you will need to be discriminating in your reading. A good place to start is with other people's reviews of the field: Which authors are prolific? Are there recurring themes and issues? What is the most recent and/or major study on your topic?

Don't be concerned that your field has been reviewed before. The different focus, methods and questions guiding your research necessitate a different focus for your review – however slight. Organise or conceptualise the field differently and your evaluation of the merit and importance of the various studies and authors will be distinct.

Try to set a reasonable limit on the number of references you consult and incorporate in your review. The best way to do this is to read some successful reports, assignments or dissertations produced by other graduate students within your department in recent years. Have a look at your supervisor's thesis and other research papers, reports or books that you think, or are advised, provide good models to imitate. How long is their literature review? How many references are cited? How many are analysed in detail?

Organising the information

You will need an organised system for keeping track of your references. Methods include:

- *EndNote* or similar referencing software. For more information on EndNote, check the library website http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/endnote
- A computer application such as an electronic card file, spread-sheet or database program
- A paper-based file of bibliographic information, with cross-referencing

When you find an article, put the publication details straight into your referencing system listing the material by author, source, content area, call number and/or web site. If you photocopied the material, note the source, author and library call number on the copy.

Reading critically

To present a critical review of the literature you must thoroughly evaluate the material, ask questions and sift through information. To do this, you must read both critically and actively, and keep *your* purpose for reading in mind. Previewing and skim reading (as discussed above) help focus your thoughts and identify key issues or arguments. Keep questioning as you read and keep the main focus of your review – and your research – in mind.

The following questions help you read the material in an active manner and sharpen your analytical skills.

The author

Who wrote the information and where and when was this work published?

Is the author a recognised expert?

The purpose

Why and for whom was the information written?

What was the author trying to discover and why is this information or research important?

The approach

What is the theoretical perspective of the author and does it differ from current belief about the topic area?

What issue, paradigm or philosophy influenced the writer's perspective and how do they develop their ideas?

Are underlying assumptions and/or knowledge explicitly stated?

Is there any bias or inconsistency in information presented?

The content

What is the controlling focus in the material?

Does this author focus on breadth or depth of information?

Is supporting information well researched and accurate, and does it support or link to the discussion?

What aspects are included or omitted, both from literature examinations and research projects?

Can you accept the findings as true?

Are findings, discussions and conclusions logical?
How does this perspective or the results differ from others?
How do these findings apply to your own work?

The structure

Does the introduction indicate aims, thesis and main points of information?
Is the framework used to organise the material clearly explained and logical?
Is the argument or focus balanced and does the content link well?

Style and format

Is the presentation style simple, complex, narrative, analytical, persuasive, or didactic?
How does this style influence the reader's response to the material?

These questions are not exhaustive but they *will* form the basis of a critical review. Asking them as you read will tend to slow your reading process down because you will be thinking as you go. However, doing your analytical work early makes the process of writing a critical review much easier. If you take comprehensive notes in your own words as you read and think, you have done the really hard work before you start to write.

BEGINNING TO WRITE

One of the most difficult things about a literature review is to know when to stop reading and start writing. In general, you should begin writing as soon as you have a basic understanding of your topic area. This not only ensures that the task of writing is not endlessly deferred, but also that early attempts to map out the field can help identify the need for further reading.

Periodically review your draft and add comments, questions and ideas. Try to make connections and comparisons between different articles, authors and studies, particularly if your reading has been spread out over a long period of time. Remember always that your review must be a critical analysis, not a catalogue. It should be written in academic prose that is clear, concise, unambiguous, objective and accurate. It should not be pompous or difficult to read.

Graduate writing requires…

- **research that is comprehensive and thorough**
- **argumentation that uses the literature to support discussion, considers all aspects of the topic or problem, and demonstrates evidence of critical analysis of available information**
- **structure and presentation that conforms to a nominated academic style**
- **writing that is clear, unambiguous, accurate, objective and concise.**

Structuring your review

To ensure that your literature review is a coherent piece of work, you need a plan and an overall structure. Some of this planning work can happen as you read, but you may also need to brainstorm a plan for the review as a whole. The concepts must be presented in an order that makes sense with clear divisions in the sets of ideas to be discussed.

There are many different ways to organise information in a literature review, for example:

- Chronologically
- By theoretical perspective
- In order of importance
- By methodological type
- Under issues-based headings
- By procedural approach

The one organisational structure to avoid at all costs is to present material from one author, followed by information from another, then another. For example, Brown (1995) found this, Smith (1997) found that, Jones (2000) found the other, and Green, Sanders and Jackson (1999) found something else. This reads more as a list rather than a discussion of the similarities, differences, strengths and so on.

Making decisions about the way in which you group authors and link ideas will help you to avoid this problem. Attempt to synthesise the material in a way that allows you not only to report what has been already written but also to compare and contrast, to critically review and to comment on the relative merits of the presented literature. The checklist below is not exhaustive but provides a good starting point.

Your review should establish:

- **the conclusions reached in important earlier research, by whom and when**
- **if these conclusions are in agreement or conflict with each other**
- **the main issues or controversies that surround the problem you are researching**
- **the merits and limitations of earlier studies, theories and/or methodologies**
- **significant gaps in previous research and new possibilities**
- **how previous research informs your understanding and investigation of the topic.**

Constructing an argument

To write a cohesive literature review, you need to present a clear line of argument. That means taking all those critical comments you made in your notes when reading, and using them to express an academic opinion or considered position on the state of knowledge in the field. Facts and theory in the literature must support your position. Examples, references and quotations should be used where appropriate.

Each section of the review needs to be clearly connected and logically ordered. The outline statement in the introduction should make the order of the arguments clear, as in the following example:

> *The aim of this paper was to review the literature on parent-therapist collaboration, and to provide suggestions for occupational therapists to use when working with parents in clinical practice. Historical and current perspectives in working with parents and families are presented, followed by discussion of some of the main issues identified in the literature and their implications for occupational therapy practice. Finally, areas requiring further study are identified.*
>
> (Hanna and Rodger 2002, p.14)

A note on academic honesty and plagiarism

Plagiarism occurs when you paraphrase or directly quote ideas, facts or arguments without appropriate citation. Anything you get from a reference, even if you write it in your own words, needs to have a citation or footnote.

Because a literature review is based on the work of other authors, you must be very careful to separate an author's ideas from your own. The examiner understands that information that is not referenced is your idea. Organisation and scrupulous note-taking and citation are the best ways to ensure that your work is correctly referenced.

HOW IS A LITERATURE REVIEW JUDGED?

The following questions are generally considered in the evaluation of a literature review:

Structure

- Is the review clearly introduced and concluded?
- Does the content flow logically?
- Is the material organised appropriately?
- Does it conform to academic writing requirements?

Selection of the material

- Is all relevant information included?
- Is the literature from a range of sources?

Referencing

- Are all bibliographic details (both in-text and reference list) accurate, complete and consistently documented?

Critical evaluation of the literature

- Has the literature been presented and evaluated clearly and objectively?
- Does the amount of detail included on an issue relate to its importance?
- Is there sufficient evaluation of design and methodological issues?
- Are authors' conflicting and complementary ideas presented and discussed?

Interpretation

- Has this discussion of the current literature contributed to the reader's understanding?
- Do conclusions present an outcome of the review?

6. EDITING TIPS FOR GRADUATE WRITERS

Careful editing can improve the quality of your writing significantly. For best results, edit your work a couple of times with a particular purpose in mind each time.

STRUCTURAL EDITING

The development of an initial plan helps to ensure you have a logical and coherent framework for presenting your ideas. This overall plan may change as you read and understand more about your topic and receive feedback from your supervisor. You may choose to move different sections around or even delete irrelevant parts. This ensures the overall structure supports your thesis and your ideas present in a sequential and clear

manner. While it remains flexible, the plan is the scaffolding for your material – if the structure is not sound, it is difficult to hold the ideas together and develop a logical argument.

When editing for structure, try to identify the topic and contribution of each paragraph in a particular section of your work.

Questions to ask yourself:

- **Does the paragraph have a point?**
- **Is the main idea clearly expressed?**
- **Does it contribute to the topic of the section?**
- **Is it in the right place/order?**
- **Does it link with the preceding and following paragraphs?**
- **Are there any gaps in the logic or evidence?**
- **Are the points sufficiently supported by examples and illustrations?**
- **Is it just repeating what other paragraphs in the section already say?**

EDITING FOR CLARITY AND ACCURACY OF CONTENT

After your structural edit, read your work again – this time looking at each *sentence* and reflecting on its accuracy, clarity and grammatical correctness.

Check the following points:

- **Are statements based on evidence, not unsupported opinions or assumptions?**
- **Is punctuation correct? Can the sentence be misinterpreted?**
- **Are the sentences too long or too complicated?**
- **Are there any clichés, colloquialisms or vague-sounding words?**
- **Are all technical terms used accurately?**
- **Are quotations exact?**

Remember that you can usually enhance the clarity and impact of writing by placing the main idea at the beginning of the sentence. Writing also sounds more professional and credible if unnecessary words are omitted. Your job is to make the reader's job as easy as possible. Avoid double negatives, words that overlap in meaning and phrasings that can be read in different ways.

7. MOTIVATION AND PROCRASTINATION

No matter how well intentioned you are at the beginning of your course, at some stage, completing work on your writing or your research becomes extremely difficult. Working, often in isolation, *is* difficult and if motivation is flagging, it becomes easier to be interrupted by anything and everything that might take you away from your academic work. Lack of motivation and procrastination – putting tasks off – are often interrelated.

Many graduate students have difficulty at some time during their studies keeping motivated about their work. Sometimes this is due to boredom with the task or topic or the whole subject, or even with the chosen course. Perhaps the desire for knowledge has diminished or the energy to write up your findings is lacking once you have found out what you wanted to know.

Alternatively, discovering a wide range of interests apart from study, needing to take on more paid work to survive, or experiencing personal problems can also make it difficult to maintain motivation. Of course, there are no easy answers to these issues – they may need attention from qualified professionals. Sometimes, however, lack of motivation for study is a kind of sophisticated procrastination problem.

The following are our top ten practical suggestions for overcoming the inability to begin or to persevere with your thesis or coursework.

1. Get into the habit of writing down your ideas when you have them, and follow up your ideas quickly. If you try to get some momentum going while you are feeling fresh and enthusiastic, you will be less likely to put things off continually.
2. Remember to DIN (Do It Now). The task will take the same amount of time whenever you do it and if you do it straight away, you relieve the burden on your memory.
3. Remind yourself that feeling guilty is a waste of energy. Be decisive about how you use your time. Either decide you really deserve a break, or put in an hour of work before you go to do something more exciting.
4. Set small goals – you are more likely to achieve them. Identify specific tasks that need to be accomplished, and break these tasks down into things that can be completed in 30 to 60 minutes. That way, you can cross items off as they are done, and this helps you to feel that you are making progress.
5. Develop the list habit. Use your diary, put a whiteboard in your room, but keep daily 'to-do' lists. (If you find yourself not getting through the tasks, shorten the list.)
6. Think about the time of day when you are most productive and schedule your more demanding academic work at times that coincide with your more productive thinking hours.
7. Consider *where* you work best. Many people find working on campus has fewer distractions than at home. If you find the atmosphere on campus is a good influence on you, then try to do most of your work there.
8. Get help from other people. Let your housemates or family know when your study times are, and ask them not to disturb you, or tell them how they can help. Meet with other students to share experiences, discuss ideas or to share frustrations. Talk with your supervisor and get his/her help, ideas and support.
9. Spoil yourself with rewards: a movie after you have submitted a draft, a chocolate bar after each successful interview/ experiment/ data collection, or checking the mail after an hour of reading or writing. Learn to congratulate yourself on what you have done, rather than chastise yourself for what you've neglected or not completed.
10. Mix your activities so that you don't spend more than 30 to 60 minutes on the one task — you can complete many nearly- finished tasks in that way. Mix in some really interesting activities (even unrelated ones like reading a novel or using Facebook) along with the short sessions of boring material.

Lack of motivation can follow illness or be the result of physical weakness, so it's a good idea to pay attention to your health and fitness.

Another aspect of your life that may need attention is your friendships: sometimes a too-intent focus on study may have isolated you from your friends, and when lack of motivation hits, you may have few people with whom to share your feelings.

Whatever you do, don't forget that life still happens. Get out into the real world for a little while, see some friends, get things in perspective, and remind yourself of your long-term goals. There were reasons why you decided to do this degree – remember them?

8. REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

WORKS CITED

Bell, J. (1999). *Doing Your Research Project*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hanna K. and Rodger, S. (2002). 'Towards family-centred practice in paediatric occupational therapy: A review of the literature on parent-therapist collaboration' *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* 49: 14-24.

RESOURCES

The Academic Skills Unit at The University of Melbourne provides a range of free pamphlets on their web site: www.services.unimelb.edu.au/asu/

Web-searching

Information on Internet Searching

http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/elib/www.html

Online Course for Research Skills

http://library.curtin.edu.au/study-and-research-tools/online-tutorials/infotrekk/

List of Useful Academic Search Engines

http://www.academicinfo.net/refengines.html

Databases, websites and other online resources by subject

http://library.curtin.edu.au/subjectguides/index.php

http://unimelb.libguides.com/index.php

List of Email Newsletters and Discussion Lists

http://tile.net/lists

Evaluating Sources

http://libguides.jcu.edu.au/evaluating/

http://library.curtin.edu.au/study-and-research-tools/online-tutorials/infotrekk/trek8.cfm

Reading and Research Strategies

Reading Strategies: using the SQ3R Method
http://www.ucc.vt.edu/lynch/TextbookReading.htm

Reading Strategies
http://www.studygs.net/crtread.htm

Note-Taking Systems
http://www.sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl/notetaking.systems.html

Conducting a Literature Review
http://unimelb.libguides.com/lit_reviews

Proofreading Your Work
http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/proong.html

Referencing

Citation Styles within the University
http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/cite/index.html

Guide to Citation Styles (APA, MLA)
http://www.murdoch.edu.au/dirs/citegdes.html

Citing and Referencing
http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/tutorials/citing/

Documenting Electronic Resources
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/584/02/

Online Resources for Graduates

Melbourne School of Graduate Research
http://www.gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/

University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association (GSA)
http://www.gsa.unimelb.edu.au/

PhD: First Thoughts to Finished Writing
http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services/phdwriting/

NOTES

http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/asu/

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