What is a literature review?
And how do I write one?

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A lit review is not . . .

- An annotated bibliography
- A book or article “review”
- An article summary or critique
- A survey of literature

Although in some ways a lit review incorporates these.

- It is also not a dump.
A lit review is . . .

your thesis/argument, which you present by synthesizing a body of work you have critically selected that is relevant to your question, claim, argument, wherein you present new developments, gaps, directions, changes, which shows how your work contributes to the field.
Purpose of the lit review

- To show that you are a scholar
- To show your skills in
  - Information seeking: that you know and can find the pertinent materials in your field
  - Critical appraisal: that you can evaluate the relevance/significance of studies in your field
- To demonstrate how your research will contribute to existing knowledge (gap)
Two obligations

• As a scholar
  • Contribute to your discipline
  • Findings which are rational, valid

• As a writer
  • Write up those findings in a way that is clear, so other scholars can follow in your footsteps
Where does the lit review fit?

**Introduction**
- Introduce the issue
- Introduce your key “characters”
- What is it about the issue you are going to address (thesis statement)
- How are you going to address it
- Why the issue is worth addressing

**The Lit Review**
- What previous research has contributed (or not)
- What do we need to know about your characters

**Method**
- Data collection and analysis

**Results**
- Your contribution
- Your “story”

**Conclusion**
- Restate the issue
- Summarize your findings and how they contribute to the larger body of research in your field
- Anything left out?
- Any surprises?
- Limitations
- Implications
Job of the Introduction

As a scholar:
• Identify your area of study
• What is the problem?
• Identify the scope of your study
• State significance
• What gap will it fill?

As a writer:
• “Hook” the reader
• What will the reader learn?
• What you’re going to do in the rest of the paper (and not do)
• Introduce the reader to your “characters”
Job of the Lit Review

As a scholar:
• Show that you know what’s been done (or not) in your field
• That you can select research that is relevant to your issue
• Know how to use sources

As a writer:
• Provide the “back story” for “characters”
• Sequence your “back story” in such a way that readers can learn what they need to know to understand your story (chapter 4)
Job of the Methods section

As a scholar:
• Complete description of how you collected and analysed your data
• Other scholars can examine your research design, determine your scholarly credibility
• For future replication

As a writer:
• Describe for reader so he is prepared for results
• Who’s involved
• What you did (plan to do) when
Job of Results/Findings

As a scholar:
• Each analytical step either confirmed your research question
• Or didn’t
• Other scholars can examine your conclusions
• To determine your scholarly credibility

As a writer:
• Address each of your research questions or hypotheses
• Did your “characters” behave the way you thought they would?
• What was different than you expected?
• Keep findings in context of your “story”
Job of Discussion/Conclusions

As a scholar:
• Confirm your research purpose
• What is significance of your results for your discipline
• What your research confirmed, or didn’t, and why/why not
• Implications

As a writer:
• Remind reader of the “story” you wanted to tell
• Then, did you tell the story you expected to tell, or some other one?
• What does it all mean?
Chapter 1
Introduction
Literally “introduces” Reader to what your paper is about

Chapter 2
Literature Review
Provides the “back story” for your “characters”

Chapter 3
Methods and Data
Straight description of how you collected your data

Chapter 4
Results
This is where you tell your story; this is why you’re here in academe

Chapter 5
Conclusion
Wrap it up, tell Reader what it all means
The writing part

It’s about what you have to say, not the sources. Paragraphs are your building blocks (P.I.E.). Sentences should have clear subject-predicate-object structure, and be shorter rather than longer. Stick to your thesis (don’t digress). Cite religiously, but don’t quote.
Synthesizing

Taking *your* argument one part at a time,

• Which authors have something to say about your themes? What do they say?
• Do they agree or disagree with each other?
• Do you agree or disagree with them (be able to argue why/why not)?
• Note any controversial findings.
• As you go, is there any aspect *not* covered?
Organizing

- Organize/develop your argument in themes
  - Theories?
  - Concepts (requiring definitions)?
  - Methodologies?
  - Chronology important?
- Search the literature using themes as keywords
- Read, then (re-)organize your argument
- Organize your literature
  (see NCSU WSTS Synthesis Matrix)