Writing Literature Reviews
What is a Literature Review?

- The literature review is a critical exploration of the existing research that is relevant to your dissertation topic.
http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/lit-review/
Purpose of the Literature Review

- To provide background information about a research topic.
- To establish the importance of a topic.
- To demonstrate familiarity with a topic/problem.
- To set the stage for further work and allow you to join a scholarly conversation.
Elements of an Effective Literature Review

An effective literature review should:

- Be organized around and directly related to the thesis or research question you are developing.
- Synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known.
- Identify areas of controversy in the literature.
- Formulate questions that need further research.
Writing the Introduction

In the introduction, you should:

- Define:
  - the general topic, issue or area of concern.
- Identify:
  - trends in what has been published about the topic;
  - conflicts in theory, methodology, evidence, and conclusions;
  - gaps in research and scholarship;
  - a single problem or new perspective of immediate interest.
- Establish:
  - the writer’s reason for reviewing the literature (point of view);
  - the criteria to be used in analyzing and comparing literature and the organization of the review (sequence); and
  - when necessary, state why certain literature is or is not included (scope).
Writing the Body

- Group research and other literature (reviews, theoretical articles, case studies, etc.) according to common denominators:
  - topical themes
  - qualitative v. quantitative;
  - conclusions of authors;
  - specific purpose or objective;
  - chronology, etc.

- Summarize individual studies or articles: remember that space (length) denotes significance.

- Use strong “umbrella” sentences at beginnings of paragraphs, “signposts” throughout, and brief “so what” summary sentences at intermediate points.
Writing the Conclusion

- Summarize major contributions of significant studies and articles: maintain focus established in introduction.

- Evaluate current “state of the art” for body of knowledge reviewed. Point out:
  - major methodological flaws or gaps in the research;
  - inconsistencies in theory and findings;
  - and areas or issue pertinent to future study.
Writing a Literature Review: In Summary

- As you read, try to see the “big picture” — your literature review should provide an overview of the state of research.
- Include only source materials that help you shape your argument. *Resist the temptation to include everything you’ve read!*
- Balance summary and analysis as you write.
- Keep in mind your purpose for writing:
  - How will this review benefit readers?
  - How does this review contribute to your study?
- Keep thinking about how you will organize everything you read in the final product.
Sources

The information for this presentation was taken from the following sources:

- [http://composition.la.psu.edu/resources/graduate-writing-center/handouts-1/Literature%20Reviews%20Fall%202010.pdf/view](http://composition.la.psu.edu/resources/graduate-writing-center/handouts-1/Literature%20Reviews%20Fall%202010.pdf/view)

- [http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review](http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review)