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## Writing A Literature Review For An Applied Master's Degree

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## Writing A Literature Review For An Applied Master's Degree

### Abstract

Many of the books and articles that discuss and provide instructions for writing a literature review are geared to doctoral students (Randolph, 2009), professors, researchers, and medical researchers. Few discuss the issues pertaining to Master's Degree students pursuing an applied master's degree. This overview is written specifically for those completing a capstone for the Master's Degree in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania.

Graduate students often experience a great deal of trepidation and anxiety when facing the task of writing a literature review for their Master's Degree capstone. This is unfortunate, as reading the literature and writing a literature review can be an informative, interesting and thought-provoking endeavor. Graduate students have the opportunity to learn about an issue of importance to them, to gain a thorough understanding of the research that has been conducted about their capstone focus, and learn what gaps exist in the literature in their area of focus.

### Keywords

literature review, writing

### Disciplines

Organizational Behavior and Theory

### Comments

Working Paper #16-01

**Writing A Literature Review For An Applied Master's Degree**  
**(UPDATED: September 19, 2017)**

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Abstract: Writing a literature review for an applied master's thesis is different from writing a literature review for a doctoral dissertation. It is essential that a master's student include a thoughtful, thorough, and critical literature review in his or her thesis, but there are few articles or guides for a literature review at this level. This article presents a step-by-step guide to aid the master's student in writing, and assist faculty in evaluating, a well-researched literature review. It discusses some of the emotional hurdles which graduate students encounter, and it emphasizes how to research and write a literature review that is focused and integrative, and that employs critical thinking skills.

Many of the books and articles that discuss and provide instructions for writing a literature review are geared to doctoral students (Randolph, 2009), professors, researchers, and medical researchers. Few discuss the issues pertaining to master's degree students pursuing an applied master's degree. This guide is written specifically for those students. The literature review for a master's thesis or capstone<sup>1</sup> is not usually as exhaustive or comprehensive as the literature review for a doctoral dissertation (Randolph, 2009). Nevertheless, the literature review in a master's thesis paper needs to be a substantive part of the paper. The focus should be on making sure that the literature that is covered is directly related to the research question(s) in the thesis, as well as being clear about what areas have been left out, and the reasons for excluding them. This article presents a step-by-step guide to aid the master's student in writing, and assist faculty in evaluating, a well-researched literature review. It discusses some of the emotional hurdles which graduate students encounter, and it emphasizes how to research and write a literature review that is focused and integrative, and that employs critical thinking skills.

### Emotional Journey

All journeys begin with anxiety (May, 1977), even if this goes unacknowledged. This is as true of writing a literature review as well as any other part of the scholarly endeavor. Unlike doctoral students, who usually write a number of literature reviews during their graduate school careers, most master's degree students have little experience in writing literature reviews. When I first started working with master's students I was surprised at the amount of anxiety they experienced when they started working on a literature review. Even students who had exhibited stellar performance during their course work seemed to lose confidence and act confused and befuddled by this task. I have received draft literature reviews that were simplistic and nearly unreadable; reviews with dozens of paragraphs summarizing articles without a shred of integration or critical review; and a few that tried to include every possible shard of information, including events as far back as 4000 B.C. Some of the anxiety appears to be due to the fact that writing a literature review is a new experience for these students.

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<sup>1</sup> Although applied master's theses can be referred to as a thesis or capstone depending on the program going forward I will use the term "thesis" to refer to both a thesis or capstone.

There appear to be a number of reasons for this anxiety. A lack of experience in writing literature reviews is certainly the most prevalent, but another type of anxiety that manifests itself is students' concern about covering the area of their research focus thoroughly. They worry about missing important research, which is often compounded by their lack of familiarity with searching for research studies and literature. They are also nervous about writing the literature review. Most of the models they have encountered previously are oriented around summarizing research. When they are asked to write an integrative and critical literature review, many students worry that, "I don't know enough to be critical of someone else's research," or "Who am I to criticize a scholar in the field?" When this type of anxiety surfaces, I reframe it (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Robson & Troutman-Jordan, 2014). First I point out that critical thinking is different from criticizing; and it is a skill that is essential for them to master as part of their development as master's students. Engaging in critical thinking (Cottrell, 2011) does not mean that you know more than others, but that you are using your thinking capabilities to note strengths, limitations, missing links, and/or logical inconsistencies in the arguments of the authors you are reading. Another way to reframe their anxiety is to point out that reading the literature and writing a literature review can be an informative, interesting and thought-provoking endeavor. Graduate students have the opportunity to learn about an issue of importance to them, to gain a thorough understanding of the research that has been conducted about their thesis focus, and learn what gaps exist in the literature in their area of focus. They will gain valuable expertise about their area of study.

### Main Goals of a Literature Review for An Applied Master's Degree

A literature review in a master's thesis/capstone has three main goals:

1. **To enhance the graduate student's understanding of the issues he/she is examining so that the thesis is well informed and thorough, and so that the capstone is focused and relevant.** The literature review informs every aspect of the thesis: the research questions, hypotheses and goals, and methodology.
2. **To present the reader of the literature review with a critical review of the research related to the thesis topic.** This information sets the reader up to understand and follow the rest of the thesis.
3. **To highlight the gaps in the literature which justify the focus of the thesis.**

### Step 1 - Initial Look at the Literature

The first step in the literature review process is to examine some of what has been written about the proposed focus of the thesis. Once the graduate student develops an initial idea of what he/she is going to examine in the thesis, it is important to do a brief search of the literature to look for significant research in that area. For example, the graduate student may be considering the issue of *resiliency during times of organizational crisis*. First, he or she should conduct an initial library search of research in this area. Doctoral students are thoroughly accustomed to the idea of using only primary sources and research from peer reviewed journals. Master's degree students, on the other hand, are often not as familiar with this emphasis. It is important for master's students to rely, as much as possible, on peer reviewed journal articles. More will be discussed about this point below.

When conducting an initial literature search, the graduate student should first look for articles that might provide a literature review or a meta-analysis of research articles in the area the thesis is focused on. Finding such a source is the equivalent of finding gold, as these articles will provide an overview of the research in the graduate student's area of interest and they often highlight recent findings and gaps in the literature. One graduate student who found a meta-analysis on his research focus told me that he

had “hit the jackpot.” If literature reviews or meta-analyses are not available, or are out of date, the graduate student should look for recent articles, and examine the literature review sections to see what articles are referred to repeatedly, what authors are seen as experts in the area, and if there are books that have recently been published in this area. The graduate student should read four or five recent articles to get an overview of the current thinking and research in this area. Below are some questions that can help guide the graduate student’s thinking as he or she reads these initial articles:

- What is the current research focused on?
- What recent discoveries, understandings, and/or theories have been put forward in this area?
- What are experts in the field saying about gaps in the field?
- What are experts in the field recommending that future research focus on?
- In what ways do the articles help refine and narrow the focus of the thesis/capstone?

At regular intervals, and before graduate students make a full commitment to this area of research, they should be asking themselves if they are still interested in this area of focus. Sometimes a deeper look at the planned area of research will dull a student’s excitement, or uncover daunting obstacles.

The goal of Step 1 is for graduate students to familiarize themselves with a few key articles that pertain to the potential area of thesis focus. By the end of Step 1, graduate students should have a clear idea of whether this is a focus which will retain their interest and engagement, and whether they want to continue to pursue it. If a graduate student decides this focus is unlikely to retain his or her interest, it is important to find a focus that will, and to repeat Step 1. When graduate students have completed Step 1, they will have settled on a capstone focus, and will likely have some ideas of how to narrow the topic to a more manageable scope.

### Step 2 - Research Question(s)/Hypotheses/Goals

Step 2 involves writing an initial research question(s) or developing hypotheses. Research questions and hypotheses should be written after the graduate student has delineated the goals of the thesis research, and after the student has done a preliminary literature search. Writing research questions, although formerly more a province of qualitative research, has now become part of rigorous quantitative studies, as well. Writing a research question or questions is key to doing rigorous research of any kind (Ravitch & Riggan, Maxwell, 2013). Ravitch and Carl (2016) is one source for practical and clear guidance about drafting and iterating research questions. Well crafted, well defined, clear, and focused research questions are essential to the success of the research endeavor. Detailing how to develop a solid research question or questions is beyond the scope of this article. However, since the research questions will guide the in-depth literature search, it is essential to emphasize their importance at this phase of the literature review.

### Step 3 - Reviewing/Reading The Literature

Once the graduate student has a research question or questions, the in-depth review of the literature can begin.

This article will not cover the actual literature search part of the process. However, some points need to be emphasized to insure that the graduate student has the necessary tools to conduct a thorough literature search. Reference librarians are as essential to graduate students as water is to a parched traveler. Reference librarians understand the intricacies of searching the literature; they know the data bases appropriate to use in the graduate student’s field of study; they are experts in developing key words that will cast a net around the focus of the student’s thesis; and they often have specific

knowledge of the field of study the graduate student is focusing on. Searching for relevant literature can be frustrating and sometimes confusing, so taking advantage of the reference librarians who are trained in this important and essential skill is key to finding the relevant literature. Here are some issues to keep in mind:

- The terms graduate students need to use to search for relevant literature are not always straightforward. At times, scholars and researchers use words or phrases that might not be familiar to the graduate student; and yet until these terms are used, essential articles may not be captured in the search. For example, a graduate student may be looking for positive approaches to performance reviews. If the graduate student is not aware that positive approaches are often called "strength-based approaches" in the literature, he or she might spend a lot of time looking for literature under a keyword that is no longer primary.
- Reference librarians can be invaluable in such cases. They have a great deal of experience in trying different key words or phrases, and they often know what phrases are currently in use.
- Every article the graduate student reads does double duty as a reference source. Scour the literature review section and the reference lists in each one. These will offer invaluable resources.

A few more words about sources. It is important that the majority of the sources for the thesis consist of peer reviewed journal articles. There are several reasons for this emphasis on peer reviewed research.

- Peer reviewed journals contain articles that have been reviewed by knowledgeable peers, experts in the field, and an editor(s). This means that the articles meet certain scientific, philosophical, theoretical and ethical standards. For more information about the focus of a particular journal, go to the journal's website to consult the mission and standards for that journal.
- Peer reviewed journals differentiate between opinion and research.
- Articles in peer reviewed journals build on previous research in the field, almost always contain a literature review or an overview of relevant literature, and include important references which can aid the graduate student's research.

Books can be a valuable source of information for the thesis, especially edited books that include chapters by experts in the graduate student's area of focus. Popular books (those written for a lay audience), which proliferate like flies in some fields, can lead to research and other sources. Graduate students should use popular books to point them to more substantive research, but should not rely on them for the main part of the literature review. There are some exceptions to this. If graduate students are examining an area for which there is not yet a lot of research, popular books may be one of the few sources available. For example, one thesis student looked at how high tech companies view millennials (El-Buckly, 2014). As he began his thesis he found that there was little research about millennials, and even less about millennials in high tech companies, so this graduate student used popular books about millennials to gain an initial understanding. It was especially important for him to cast a critical eye on these sources, however, as they often included hearsay, opinion, and biased assumptions.

Learning how to read, review, and use peer reviewed journal articles is an important aspect of all master's degree programs. Although it is fine to use newspaper articles or articles from popular magazines (e.g., *Harvard Business Review*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company*) as starting points to lead the graduate student to current research or experts, these articles should make up only a tiny fraction of the thesis reference list.

#### Step 4 – Organizing The Literature Review

Cooper (1988), has described a taxonomy for literature reviews which many others have adopted (Randolph, 2009). In this taxonomy Cooper lists three ways of organizing a literature review: 1) historical, 2) conceptual, and 3) methodological (Cooper, 1988, p. 109). Since this article is written specifically for those who are pursuing an applied master's degree, it is important to add a fourth category to Cooper's system of organizing a literature review: application. Within these broad categories there are lots of decisions to be made about the focus and orientation of the literature review. Before delving into those decisions it is important to state clearly and unequivocally what a literature review *should not* follow. A literature review is *not* an extended book report in which the graduate student lists articles or books he/she has read and summarizes each of them briefly. This practice is not only deathly boring to the reader, but it completely bypasses the graduate student's critical thinking capacity, and does nothing to support the student's argument for the importance of his or her work. "Reviewing the literature is not stamp collecting. A good review does not just summarize the literature, but discusses it critically, identifies methodological problems, and points out research gaps" (Pautasso, 2013, p. 3). With that warning out of the way, let's delve into the organizational decisions that need to be made.

The literature review, must be based on two key questions at all times: 1) what is (are) the research question(s) and 2) what are the gaps in the literature?.

Building on Cooper (1998), I suggest some key questions that the master's student needs to ask herself/himself as decisions are made about how to organize the literature review.

Table 1: Questions to Ask in Deciding How to Organize a Literature Review

Types of Thesis Research				
	Historical	Conceptual	Methodological	Applied
Examination of a practice or application – an evaluation of existing practices or assumptions	How has this practice or application been viewed, evaluated in the past?	On what theoretical and conceptual frame is this practice or application based?	What methodological approaches and methods have been used to examine this practice or application?	
Examination of a practice from a historical perspective		What theoretical or conceptual frame is used to examine this issue? Have these theoretical and conceptual frames changed over time? If so, in what ways?	What methodological approaches and methods have been used to examine this practice? Have these methodological and conceptual frames changed over time? If so, in what ways?	When was this practice first developed? How is this practice applied? How has this practice changed over time? What does the research indicate about this practice currently and over time?
Examination of a conceptual or theoretical framework.	When was this conceptual or theoretical framework first developed? How has this conceptual or theoretical framework changed over time?		What methodological approaches and methods have been used to test these theoretical and conceptual frames? What has the research indicated?	What practices have grown out of these conceptual and theoretical frames?
Examination of a methodological issue or practice	When was this methodological issue or practice developed? What were the historical circumstances surrounding its development? How has this methodological approach changed over time?	What conceptual and theoretical frames inform this methodological issue or practice?		How has this methodological issue or practice been applied? What are the results of these applications? Has this changed over time? If so, in what ways?

An analogy for the organization of the literature review is to think about how one goes about telling a story. The first consideration is to determine what type of story is being told. For a fuller description of this analogy see Appendix B. The writer of the literature review needs to ask, "What type of story does the literature review need to tell, given the research question(s), hypotheses and goals of the thesis?" Here are some examples of the types of stories that a literature review could tell:

- If the research is examining current practices in a field, it is essential to summarize the research that has been done on how that current practice is being used, and its effectiveness. For example, if the thesis research is looking at recent developments in the use of ultrasound equipment in rural clinics it would be important to start with the most up-to-date research (Brunetti, Heller, Richter, Kaminstein, Youkee, Giordani, Goblirsch & Tamarozzi, 2016).
- If the research is examining a historical practice or application, it is important to discuss the historical period in which that practice or application was developed, how the practice or application has changed over time, and its current use. Understanding the historical circumstances that influenced the development of the field of behavioral economics would be an example of this kind research focus (ur Rehman, 2016).
- If the research is examining how conceptual and theoretical frames have influenced a practice or application, it is important to discuss how that conceptual and theoretical frame has been examined, tested and applied over time, and whether the data indicates its continued usefulness. One might, for example, examine Prospect Theory and see how it has held up to research scrutiny (Barberis, 2013).
- If the research is examining a methodological issue or approach, it would be important to understand how those methodological issues or that approach has been applied, how its application has changed over time, and examples of how it is currently being applied. For example, the controversy taking place in the field of microfinance over the use of double-blind research trials would be illustrative of this approach (Bauchet, Marshall, Starita, Thomas, & Yalouris, 2011).

Once the broad decisions have been made about how to organize the literature review, other aspects of the review need to be decided upon. Is the literature review going to be organized thematically, or by gaps in the literature or by future research? For example, if the research is going to examine a complex issue like the effectiveness of leadership development programs in changing behavior, a thematic organization might be best.

Carnwell and Daly (2001) discuss four different approaches to writing a literature review:

1. "Dividing the literature into themes or categories
2. Presenting the literature chronologically
3. Exploring the theoretical and methodological literature
4. Examining theoretical literature and empirical literature in two sections" (pg. 43).

This list is not exhaustive, but gives an idea of four possible approaches. The most important factor in deciding about an approach is to make sure that the approach the graduate student takes is congruent with the research questions, hypotheses and goals of the thesis.

In Table 2, I discuss three ways to organize the literature review, when these are appropriate, and an example of each one.

Table 2: How to Organize A Literature Review - Subcategories

Thematic	Gaps in the Literature	Future Research
Appropriate when the research question has multiple parts to it and/or previous research has shown multiple aspects of the issue to be relevant	Appropriate when there is little previous research on the research question.	Appropriate when current research indicates the continued inadequacy of current approaches or solutions. The thesis might be piloting a new approach.
Example: if the research is examining effective teams, current research indicates the importance of trust, conflict management, compelling direction, etc. The literature review might be grouped by these themes so that the reader can gain an understanding of the various components involved in effective teams.	Example: If there is little previous research on the focus of the thesis research, the graduate student needs to make a case for why he or she is examining a particular issue. Although a good deal of research has been done on mindfulness in <b>clinical settings (primarily in the fields of psychology, medicine, education and neuroscience) and more recently, a limited amount in organizations</b> , there has been little focus on mindfulness and organizational change (Behringer, forthcoming). The literature review would therefore be focused on what has been done and discussing what is missing (i.e., gap).	Example: A product, process, or approach is currently not working or is inadequate, and the field needs to focus on developing new approaches. Perhaps the thesis is piloting a new approach, so the emphasis on the importance of future research would be justified. For example, Kilpatrick's (Stokking, 1996) evaluation categories for educational programs have long been criticized. If the master's thesis is testing a new evaluation format, the thesis would need to emphasize articles critical of Kilpatrick's assessment categories.

### Step 5 - Frame: Critical & Integrative

Examining articles and research critically is a primary task of the literature reviewer. This focus should be in evidence when writing the literature review. The author of a literature review is not merely a reporter, describing what was discovered during the search of the research. The bulk of the literature review should be spent in a critical thinking frame of mind (Cottrell, 2011).

From a critical thinking perspective, here are the types of questions the graduate student should be asking himself/herself:

- What are the themes in the research under review?
- Do the themes match the problems or issues that are being examined?
- What is emphasized in the research being reviewed?
- What types of research methodologies are used in the literature being reviewed? Do these methodologies fit what is being examined? (For example, if surveys are the primary research tool in a study that is trying to understand how individuals become involved in unethical organizational conduct, a student could argue that the methodology is incomplete, as it does not probe deeply into a participant's thinking, conduct, and feelings.)
- What assumptions, biases, and limitations are present in the literature being reviewed?
- What is emphasized and what is missing from the research being reviewed?

This is not an exhaustive list of questions, but provides a starting place for thinking critically about the literature under review.

It is important for graduate students to be aware of the difference between their opinions and their critical thinking skills. Although there are some aspects of opinion involved in critical thinking, the opinions expressed as part of a person's critical thinking need to be supported by logic, examples, and evidence. For example, a graduate student may want to express an opinion about whether he/she liked an article, research or point of view, but the student's opinion at this point is completely irrelevant to the work at hand. While what he/she likes and dislikes might be of interest to family, friends and neighbors, it should not be part of a literature review. Comments about the usefulness or relevance of a piece, on the other hand, are an important part of the review. Here are some examples of critical thinking comments that one might make about a research article:

- "The author does a good job of spelling out the limitations of the study. The author notes that the study examined only a small sample of middle managers, and was further limited by the fact that they all came from one industry." This statement includes the graduate student's opinion ("good job"), but is also supported by examples or evidence.
- "The research goals of the study were unclear [opinion]. The authors do not provide a clear research question, and do not specify the goals of the study. This is further exemplified by the lack of a clear focus in their literature review and using multiple methodologies without specifying the purpose of the different methodologies "
- "The literature review in this study is not related to the research question. The authors review five different literatures without being clear about how they relate it to the research they have undertaken."
- "The conclusions that the authors reach do not follow from their findings. The findings are quite limited, and yet the authors argue for very broad application of their research."
- "The research the authors conducted does not fill a gap in the literature, it does not move the research in this area ahead, and it seems to merely repeat many studies that have been done previously. The study is not a replication study, so its purpose is unclear."

Cronin, Ryan & Coughlan (2008) advise: "Inconsistencies and contradictions in the literature should also be addressed..., as should the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the body of literature. The role of the reviewer is to summarize and evaluate evidence about a topic, pointing out similarities and differences..." (p. 43).

Above all, the literature review should be an integrated whole. The graduate student should avoid at all costs the writing of little overviews of articles. The literature review should discuss major themes, trends, theories, etc. in the literature. The analogy to telling a story is relevant here. Each paragraph should tell some aspect of the story, and together the paragraphs should form an *integrated whole*.

#### Outline of What to Include In the Literature Review

The literature review should include these essential elements:

- Introduction - In which the author provides a roadmap for the reader about the focus of the thesis and what is covered in the literature review.
- Background - Provide context, background information or statistics that will help the reader understand what follows. For example, if the research is focused on leadership development, provide statistics on the estimated total amount spent on leadership efforts in a year, the number of schools, consulting firms, etc. who specialize in this areas, etc.
- Definitions - Define the terms being used in the research question(s) or hypotheses.

- Main Body of the Literature Review – A review of relevant literature organized in a way that tells a coherent story related to the research question.
- Gaps in the Literature - Discuss gaps in the literature that are related to the thesis.
- Conclusion - Summarize key points of the literature review that the reader needs to keep in mind as she or he proceeds through the rest of the thesis.

### Staying Focused

Even though the literature review is a separate chapter in the thesis, it is part of the integrated whole of the document. The literature review provides background, support and compelling evidence for the importance of the thesis. If it is a research-based thesis, the literature review provides support for the research questions, hypotheses and goals, and provides justification for the research methods employed. Without the structure and focus provided by the literature review, a graduate student is in danger of going down blind alleys, repeating ideas or research that have already been discredited, or wandering off into the hinterlands never to be seen again.

### Essential Things To Do & Things to Not Do

#### Things to Do:

- Critically evaluate the articles and books read.
- Write the literature review as an integrated whole.

#### Things To *Not* Do:

- Do not* string together a series of book reports, article reviews, or summaries of articles. "Care must be taken, however, that the review does not end up just as a description of a series of studies (Cronin & Coughlan, 2008, p. 42)." It also should not be a series of quotes strung together.
- Do not* include irrelevant or adjacent research in the literature review. Many thesis students want to show their advisor and readers how much they have read, so they cram the literature review with background articles, extraneous research and a detailed history of their topic. Focus on the heart of the topic, not adjacent areas.

### Conclusion

A well-crafted literature review serves as a solid foundation for the rest of the master's thesis. It will help the graduate student stay focused on the goal of the paper, prevent her or him from going off on time consuming tangents, and strengthen the quality and rigor of the research. Time spent on the literature review will make an enormous difference in the quality of the thesis.

### Appendix A

Questions for the graduate student to ask as he/she reads articles for the literature review:

- What is the author's frame or orientation?
- What type of article (i.e., research, literature review, secondary source, theoretical, opinion) (Collins, 2003) is this?
- What theoretical frame does the article take?

- What is the purpose of the article (research question & goals)?
- What methodology is used to gather data?
- What are the major findings of the research article?
- What are the outcomes of the study?
- What recommendations are made? Are the recommendations aligned with the results of the study?
- Other relevant information (e.g., first study of its kind, unusual results, etc.)?
- What are the key thoughts about the article?

It is useful to keep a spreadsheet to keep track of the articles read. Here is an example of the categories that the student might want to include.

Table 3: Sample Spreadsheet of Article Overviews

Citation	Focus of research	Relevance to current thesis	Methodology & Methods Used in Article	Strengths of the research	Limitations of the Research
Author, date, title, publication, volume #, issue #, pages	Key words – focus of article	1.Strong 2.Medium 3.Weak (One sentence on why)	Type of methodology and methods used Fit of the methodology and methods	Short list	Short list

#### Appendix B

It is worth explaining the ways in which the analogy of telling a story can help the graduate student design and write the literature review in an interesting and compelling way.

- 1) In the beginning of a story the author sets the scene and provides background and context. At the start of the literature review the same thing should happen. The graduate student needs to tell the reader what is being examined, researched and discussed. Provide background and context. For example if the thesis looks at employee engagement, discuss how the term is defined, what research in the field has emphasized, and what the literature review will cover.
- 2) In the next part of a story the author develops the characters, plot and dramatic tension. In the literature review this is the part where the main research literature that is the focus of the thesis is discussed. This section might be organized thematically or along other lines depending on the focus of the thesis. Continuing to use the example of a research project that focuses employee engagement, a thesis might examine the popularity of the view that employee engagement can be a firm's competitive advantage. The literature review could be organized by examining when employee engagement started to be viewed as a competitive advantage, in what ways it has been shown to be a competitive advantage for firms, and some of the criticisms of this approach to employee engagement.
- 3) In a story the author is building the dramatic tension towards some type of resolution or denouement. Although the literature review may not be solving a mystery or discussing some major argument or conflict among researchers, there is still a dramatic aspect to the literature review. For example, perhaps there was a great deal of research on the issues being examined in the 1970's and 1980's and little since. The discussion could examine the reasons for the

popularity of the research during those decades and why it has fallen off. (Perhaps a theory or research focus proved to be a dead end, perhaps a researcher was discredited, etc.) Another example would be the controversy that surfaced in the field of microfinance about eight years ago. Some researchers claimed that the majority of research on microfinance, which had been qualitative, was flawed and inaccurate (Bauchet, et. al., 2011), and what was needed was double-blind experimental studies to see if microfinance really produced results. This controversy included polite name-calling and aggressive statements by researchers in different camps, and had all the elements of a dramatic conflict. Although it is unlikely that all areas of research will have such engaging drama, it is still important to examine the tensions and conflicts in the area under review. This should also include a focus on the gaps in the literature.

- 4) The last part of the story is where the author provides a conclusion. In the literature review this means that it will conclude with a summary of the main points of the literature review, emphasize the gaps that were encountered in the search, and discuss how these gaps in the literature can be addressed. This section should be a clear argument and justification for the importance of the thesis, i.e., how the author's work will add to the literature and/or research.

Some graduate students have incorrectly understood the analogy of the literature review as a compelling story to mean that they should tell how they went about the literature review, their experiences with the reference librarian, their difficulty finding sources, etc. This is not what is meant by viewing the literature review as a story. While these experiences and incidents may be of interest to family and friends they should not be part of a literature review.

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