

Science, Scientific Discovery and Statistics

Seminar 9: Literature Reviews

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Today

- ① Lecture recap:
 - what a literature review is meant to do
 - how to move from overview to puzzle to question to framework
 - practical advice on writing one effectively
- ② Example:
 - banks lobbying in the EU
- ③ Further guidance
- ④ Seminar task and discussion

What a literature review is really doing

- It is **not** just a list of everything written on a topic.
- It should map the main conversations, concepts, and findings so the reader can see what we already know.
- It should then identify a **puzzle**: what is missing, unresolved, weakly measured, or theoretically under-explained.
- The review should move the reader from broad background knowledge to a precise reason why **your** project is needed.

My advice: write from map to argument

Good practice

- group papers by themes, mechanisms, or debates
- compare what authors assume, explain, and measure
- use signposting to show where your argument enters
- keep asking: what does this literature help me explain?

Weak practice

- summarising one paper after another chronologically
- treating disagreement as confusion rather than analytical leverage
- using citations as decoration instead of evidence
- ending without a clear research question or framework

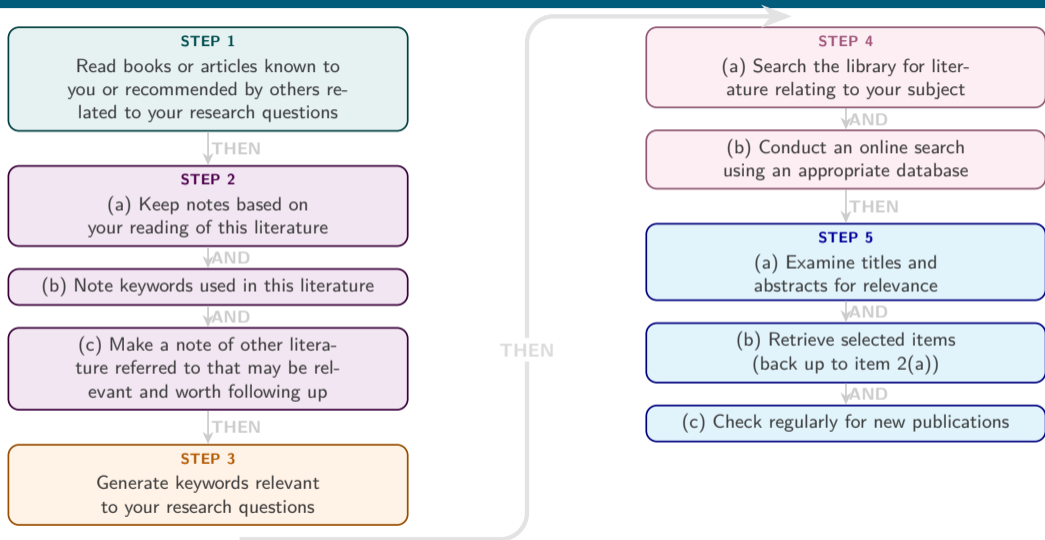
Takeaway

Rule of thumb: write the review for argument, not for inventory.

Literature Reviews

- ① A review of the extant literature pertaining to the topic, organised thematically and emphasising the strengths
- ② **Focus** the reader towards the “puzzle”: the flaw, gap, weakness, etc.
- ③ Use this to **narrow** down to the research question
- ④ **Go wide again**, to set up the theoretical framework with which the question can be answered

Literature Search Workflow



Evaluating Publication Quality

Higher-Quality Sources

- ✓ Peer reviewed
- ✓ Books (monographs)
- ✓ Available in print
- ✓ Recent publications
- ✓ Frequently cited
- ✓ Formally published

Lower-Quality Sources

- × Not peer reviewed
- × Periodicals
- × Online-only publications
- × Older sources
- × Rarely cited
- × Working papers, drafts

Example Top Journals

Am. J. of Political Science
Foreign Policy Analysis
International Interactions
Int. Studies Quarterly
J. of Conflict Resolution
J. of Peace Research
Journal of Politics
Political Analysis
PS Research & Methods
State Politics & Policy Q.

Takeaway Prioritise peer-reviewed, frequently cited, recently published work from recognised journals. Use working papers and grey literature as supplements, not foundations.

Further Guidance

- The literature review is not just a chronological inventory of the topic, but rather used to guide the reader on how these literatures weave together.
- Being critical is not about just finding literature to criticise – find the trade-offs, pros and cons, where you stand, etc.
- Not only use the core literature narrowly, but also instrumental literature related to your study. Examples:
 - Regulation of AI → new issues for regulation (e.g., GM foods)
 - Firms and regulation → IR two-level games
 - Legislator behaviour → game theory models of individual behaviour
- Related literature methodologically, conceptually, empirically.

Best Practices: Using LLMs for Literature Reviews

1. Discovery & scoping — not replacement

- Use prompts like: "Summarise the three main debates on X since 2015" to map a field quickly
- Always verify outputs against Google Scholar, Scopus, or Web of Science — LLMs hallucinate citations

2. Structuring & synthesising

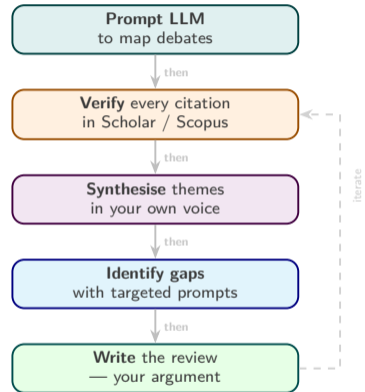
- Upload 5–10 key PDFs and ask: "Group these papers by method, finding, and theoretical lens"
- Use LLMs to draft thematic outlines, then rewrite in your own analytical voice

3. Critical engagement

- Prompt for gaps: "What mechanisms does this literature leave unexplained?"
- Ask for methodological critiques: "What identification concerns apply to these designs?"

4. Red lines

- **Never** cite a paper you have not read yourself
- **Never** submit LLM prose as your own analysis — it is a thinking tool, not a ghostwriter



Read through the short review essay “A Critical Review of the Concept of Middle Power”, part of a PhD project.

- **Assess whether you can determine from the text:**
 - What is middle power?
 - Are there “schools of thought” or “camps”? If so, what are they? Who are the key scholars?
 - What is the key gap or need for contribution?
 - What is suggested to fill the gap or contribute?
- **Note these:**
 - Was this piece clear for someone joining “mid-conversation”?
 - Is the review analytical? If so, how?
 - Is the author’s voice evident? If so, how?

Evaluating the Literature Review

Strengths

- Clear overview of the main approaches to middle power theory: *functional*, *behavioural*, and *hierarchical*.
- Strong critical intervention: the author argues that existing literature is too focused on liberal cooperation and does not adequately explain security politics.
- The move to classical realism gives the review a distinctive theoretical angle and provides a clear alternative framework.

Weaknesses

- The review is highly theory-driven and offers limited empirical evidence to show that the alternative framework works better in practice.
- The critique of existing literature can feel overstated: behavioural and functional approaches may already capture some agency and security concerns.
- The review focuses more on *reframing* the debate than on systematically evaluating the full range of existing scholarship.

Overall: a strong conceptual critique, but less convincing as a fully evidenced replacement for existing middle power approaches.

Recap of the course, final thoughts, questions about the data project.