

Preparation work

The first step in conducting any research is to formulate a specific research problem and related research questions. The research problem posed at the beginning of any project is often very general. The research question needs to be focused. Haverkamp and Young (2007) believe it is important for researchers to identify the explicit purpose of their qualitative investigations which they see as falling under one of distinct categories. These include theory focused research, practice or evaluation-focused research, action or change research. By identifying the exact purpose of the study the researcher moves towards a clearer understanding of the knowledge and data required of the topic under investigation. At the core of all qualitative research is the understanding and interpretation of what it means to be human (Kendler 2005; Polkinghorne 2005).

For example, to simply state that you want to conduct a study of older people living in nursing homes is not very specific. What aspects of the institutionalisation process do you want to learn about? Do you want to study why older people are admitted into nursing homes, or what happens to them once they are admitted? Are you interested in examining issues which are associated with the pre- or post-admission stage, or both? Do you want to study the views of older men, older women, or both? Will you include the physically or mentally disabled? What conceptual framework will you be adopting? Will this be an action research aimed at changing some elements of existing policies with respect to improving the rights of older people living in nursing homes, or a theory piece of research aimed at producing new sociological knowledge about older people as 'the other' as a result of the depersonalisation process of living in residential care.

These questions need to be answered prior to entering the field. Answers to these questions assist researchers to clarify and narrow their research focus. Researchers rarely start collecting data on the day that they think of a research question. Time is set aside to reflect on the question being asked. The question is posed in the context of previous work on the topic. For example, if you were researching the meaning of music for older people, you would need to develop a research proposal that was more specific than the broad topic of music and older people and narrow down the direction and outcomes of the study. In other words, you would need to consider the particular context and focus of the investigation before starting to review the literature. For example, consider the following questions in light of this suggested study:

- Would you focus your research on people living in the community, or in residential care, or both?
- What definition of older people would you use? For example, in Australia a senior person is assumed to be 55 years and older (based on the seniors' benefits afforded by the federal government), although the more conventional definition is 60 years and upwards. Minichiello and Coulson (2005) describe older people as fitting into three distinct categories. These include the *young* old (60-70 years), *middle* old (70-80 years), and *old* old (80+ years).
- Is it the experience and perception of how people use music in their lives that you would look to explore? Or is it the musical preferences of music style by older people?
- Would you consider the ways music contributes to an older person's sense of well-being or health, or how music might fulfil specific needs and functions in their life?
- How would you select your informants? Would you only interview people with a music background or people with no training in music?
- Would the study be gender specific? Or would you try to collect data from a balanced number of both males and females?
- Would you collect data from a broad cross-section of the community or only those people who were identified as having an interest in music?

It is understandable, therefore, that the study of the meaning and importance of music in the lives of older people could be very diverse. The focus of the research might largely depend on the particular perspective, interests and background of the researcher. For example, a sociologist might be more inclined towards a conceptual framework that takes a psychosocial perspective, while an educator would be more interested in the aspects of life-long learning, a psychologist the psychological benefits of being engaged with music, an occupational therapist with the physiological perspective of engagement with music, or a gerontologist who might be more focused towards looking at the ageing process.

It is these types of questions that need careful consideration before entering the field and collecting data. Consideration of these questions will assist the researcher to clarify and narrow the research focus. This will take some time and reflection, with the ideal research question being posed in the context of previous knowledge on the topic. For example, the above study concerning *music and older people* might assume the researcher would enter the field with some knowledge in either the fields of music, sociology, gerontology or psychology, or a combination of these areas.

There are two types of preparation work that researchers engage in prior to entering the field. One type of preparation work relates to developing strategies for getting in, learning the ropes, maintaining relations, leaving the field and developing sampling and other methods of procedure. The preparation work discussed in this chapter relates directly to the conceptualisation of the research statement and research question. Although the details of a researcher's preparation work are seldom reported in their final report, a considerable amount of time is usually spent on this activity to ensure 'familiarity with what is known, and what is still unknown and untested' (Best & Kahn 2006, p. 39). By citing studies that show substantial agreement alongside those that present conflicting conclusions, the researcher is better placed to sharpen and define their understanding of existing knowledge in the area of intended research. It also helps to ensure that previous research is not duplicated unless specifically intended.

Preparation work involves spending time locating and reading literature that will assist with answering the core questions, to define the direction and scope of the research. It may also involve documentary research and use of tools such as biographical dictionaries, membership directories of professional associations, newspapers, and *Who's Who in Australia* to learn more about specific individuals, places or situations. The contemporary researcher needs to know how to access information through Web-based directories, on-line journals, libraries accessible through program resources such as *Endnote*, and internet search engines. Other available secondary resources could include the services of Internet book suppliers. For example, *Amazon.com* not only provides access to the purchase of books on specific topics, but they will also provide other suggested books and resources based on your publication enquiry.

This chapter discusses why reviewing the literature is essential in the research process, and suggests ways to source relevant information to undertake a literature review. The review includes looking at both the technical literature and the non-professional, popular literature. The technical literature includes research, theoretical and philosophical reports and papers which characterise the formal knowledge base of the professions and disciplines. The non-professional and popular literature includes material such as biographies, diaries, fiction writing and catalogues.

Why conduct a review of literature?

There are many reasons for conducting a review of the literature. The most obvious one is to find out what is already known about the topic chosen for study. If you decide to investigate what younger people think about safe sex, then a good starting point is to find out if other researchers have asked this question and what they have reported. There is little point asking a question which has already been the topic of extensive investigation unless your sole aim is to replicate the study on a different population (for example, Aboriginal youths/Australian youths). Research should also never be conducted in ignorance of previous knowledge. The accumulation of knowledge depends on its being connected to current ideas. There are very few topics that do not have *some* published material.

An important aspect of a researcher's work is to place his or her study in the context of current knowledge and to broaden scientific knowledge. Researchers conduct a search of the literature not only to find what others have written on the topic, but to justify the contribution their study will make to current knowledge. For example, Hays (2006), when investigating the meaning and function of music in the lives of older people, also identified how music contributes to a person's sense of *self* and identity. The findings showed how music has the potential to facilitate personal well-being and feelings of good health for many older people, especially those who have special needs. The findings also revealed that music could be used to facilitate people feeling less isolated, more competent, and more in control of their life. The meaning music has in many older people's lives is not only associated with emotions and life experiences, but also contributes to on-going cognitive stimulus, imaginative play and escape from daily routines.

The review of the literature assists researchers to locate conceptual schemes which can act as a guide to raising questions and making sense of data. For example, Hays, Minichiello and Wright (2000) developed a model for understanding the nature of the relationship between mentor and protégé as it applies to musicians. In this study the authors investigated the ways the mentor relationship develops from both the perspective of the teacher and the student. The study describes the roles and expectations and provides insight into how these relationships develop. Researchers can often follow up on an idea that has been mentioned in a report and identify additional questions that could be investigated further. It is important to note the limitations of a study and to consider possible leads for future exploration.

Finally, a review of the literature can provide useful suggestions on how to plan the method design of your study. Much can be learnt from the experience of other researchers regarding issues of locating and gaining access to subjects. In recent years, a rich literature has been published on researchers' personal accounts of their fieldwork experiences (Fink 2005; Gash, 2000; Rice & Ezzy 2002). The researcher can learn many lessons from both the successes and failures of other researchers. For example, the ethical question of confidentiality which Laud Humphreys (1970) confronted after publishing the results of his study on impersonal sex in public places, draws our attention to the difficulties researchers can face when conducting disguised research. One might also consider the mine field of ethical considerations associated with the research of Steven Zeeland (1996; 1995; 1993) who interviewed people from the US armed forces, many of whom were interviewed immediately following casual sex with the researcher.

Undertaking a critical review of the literature

While all researchers recognise the contribution a review of literature plays in the research process, there is some debate among qualitative researchers on the role it should play in assisting researchers to formulate their research questions. Quantitative researchers identify the hypotheses that will be tested in their studies prior to entering the field. The purpose of conducting a review of the literature is to ensure that all relevant assumptions are incorporated into the study design. Hypotheses are spelled out,

variables identified and questionnaires constructed on the basis of this knowledge. For example, there is little opportunity for the researcher to change or add new questions once the data-collection stage has begun.

Qualitative researchers do not necessarily need to identify their propositions prior to entering the field. The methodological thrust of qualitative research is the possibility of the development of theory without any particular commitment to specific prior knowledge, nor do they search out data to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the field. Rather, as Glaser (1992) argues, propositions and theories are developed from the many pieces of evidence which are interconnected concurrently with the data-collection process. Thus, in qualitative studies the literature acts as a stimulus for thinking.

Qualitative researchers, however, do not always agree as to whether the review of the literature should be conducted before or after the fieldwork (Glaser 1992; Strauss & Corbin 1990). Glaser (1998) makes the point that researchers often bring a prior knowledge of their field to their investigation and because of this it is not necessary to review all the literature beforehand, as is usually undertaken by quantitative researchers.. Others suggest that reviewing the literature can effect the induction nature of qualitative research which helps determine the direction and focus (Gay, Mills & Airasian 2006).

Haverkamp and Young (2007) suggest reviewing the relevant literature on a specific topic can help facilitate the researcher in becoming more focused in their investigation and more sophisticated in designing and refining their research project. They also state that the critical issue with regards to what is known in regard to existing literature is not *what is known*, but how the researcher makes use of the knowledge in terms of the direction and design of their own research (Haverkamp & Young 2007).

The literature review should be conducted throughout the qualitative research process. There are several reasons for this. First, the literature may sensitise you to crucial issues that others have identified, as well as to examine what has been neglected in the literature. Second, the literature may spark off ideas about how to proceed with the research or even identify questions which could be included in the analysis. It is not uncommon for researchers to provide insights into further lines of investigations in their published reports. Third, reading the literature for ideas, as suggested by Glaser (1992), may generate theoretical sensitivity to concepts. Fourth, the literature can identify sampling categories which you may want to include in the research design. And finally, the researcher, by being aware of what has been published on the topic, is better placed to examine, for example, reasons for discrepancies between what is reported in the literature and what the data suggests, and pursue this line of inquiry while in the field.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest the search and review of literature should be viewed as a sounding board for ideas and interpretations should not be taken for granted. In line with the theoretical principles underlying qualitative methodology, the researcher measures his or her achievement by calling into question prior knowledge

and discovering new ideas. The major challenge when conducting a review of the literature within a *qualitative research design* is contending with ‘rich derailments provided by the relevant literature in the form of conscious or unrecognised assumptions of what ought to be found in the data’ (Glaser 1992, p. 31). For this reason, it is important that you do not enter the field with a fixed framework that will automatically interpret what you see or hear. If the data fit the concepts from the literature, do not be afraid to borrow them. If they do not, it is an error to force the data to fit the concepts.

What is a literature review?

A literature review is a report and critical discussion of published material usually generated through scholarly writing and research that is topic specific. Hence, the term *literature review*. The review should be a systematic and thorough search of all types of published literature including books, journal articles, reports, conference papers or seminars, theses, web sites and other published material (Gash 2000). Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006, p. 39) further state ‘the major purpose of reviewing the literature is to determine what has already been done that relates to the topic. This knowledge not only prevents you from unintentionally duplicating another person’s research, it also gives you the understanding and insight you need to place your topic within a logical framework’.

The literature review is based on the assumption that knowledge is cumulative and builds on previous knowledge (McMillan & Schumacher 2006). The review can also be an important preliminary step in focusing the research in terms of what ideas and knowledge have already been generated on the topic. For many early stage researchers such as doctoral candidates, undertaking a comprehensive review provides the opportunity for the individual to narrow their research focus and identify the missing links in published literature on a specific topic.

Ideally, a well-researched literature review should include all of the following:

- Relate to, and be organised around, a particular research topic
- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses within the literature
- Identify key writers and researchers in the field
- Discuss and identify key data, theories and propositions already published
- Uncover areas that need further clarification and research
- Identify and discuss controversial data
- Use grounded reasoning and sound argument to describe the literature
- Use triangulated methods to explore and understand knowledge
- Stimulate new ideas for further exploration.






In writing a review of the literature, the researcher needs to identify relevant information; be able to cross-check resources; provide a thoughtful discussion and reflective critique of the published material. According to Fink (2005, p.17) there are four key words that summarise a good research literature review. These are: *systematic*, *explicit*, *comprehensive* and *reproducible*. The review should be *systematic* in terms of logically uncovering all of the relevant published material that is critical to the research topic. The review should be also *explicit* and *comprehensive* in the discussion and critique of the literature to date, identifying gaps and providing a rationale for the current research which will ultimately contribute to the knowledge on the topic. Finally, it should be *reproducible* by way of tracking and evidence.

Using the library

Nowadays most institutions, including colleges and universities, provide online access to library catalogues, indexes and bibliographic databases. Often these can be accessed remotely through the institution's computer network or via the Internet. This means that people can access information from the comfort of their work space or office. Many libraries provide inter-library access which is provided through negotiated protocols between institutions. If you decide to advance a particular search for literature it is possible there may be a charge for the consumer through the access library.

Throughout the entire process of undertaking research to the final stages of writing a thesis, report or paper for publication, it is important that you are able to track and maintain a system whereby you have direct access to references and material cited in your work. It is therefore, highly recommended that you consider using a software program like *EndNote* which helps you create a personalised database of references. The software allows you to enter your references manually, or by importing from a bibliographic database (eg, PsycInfo); and to create a bibliography in the citation or bibliographic style you require. (For more information go to: <http://www.endnote.com>).

This bibliography program works interactively with Microsoft Word (including PC and Macintosh versions) and provides direct access to your personal library database when writing, so you can include citations directly into your word document. This software program also allows you to access many library catalogues around the world, providing a means to track down literature and gain the correct citations. The main functions of *Endnote* include:

-  Maintenance of a database of references
-  Downloading references from other databases
-  Using the database to link to references in word-processed documents
-  Generating a bibliography in the correct style for publication
-  Inclusion of key information. For example, page numbers, key words for future cross-referencing and searching.

The *Endnote* program is regularly up-dated and provides over 1000 different reference style formats, and possible connection to more than 300 library databases throughout the world (although some of these require password entry). It is possible to access some databases via the Internet using the *EndNote* software, and download references directly from the database into your *EndNote* library. Many library catalogues and on-line journals allow direct downloading of reference data into a personal library file. While this is a great facility for any researcher, it is advisable that you take care to separate material that is potentially useful (in other words, material you will follow up) with material which has been read, is relevant and might be cited in your writing. Otherwise, you will have a very large library database that is contaminated with material you have not read, and which should not be cited in your writing. It is also important that you make adjustments to the style format of downloaded reference material so that it conforms to your own library file. For example, if you normally enter an author in your library database as CD Smith, you would need to amend any downloaded reference that might refer to Charles Desmond Smith. By doing this, you will have consistency in your referencing lists and avoid the laborious work of amending every reference included in your bibliography when you have finished writing.

While the library catalogue is a useful place for researchers to begin a literature search, it does not always provide access to all published material on a topic, nor include up to date articles in journals. Unlike books, articles in journals are written and published much more rapidly and frequently. These often represent the most recent literature on the topic. For this reason, journals are an excellent starting point to trace the literature. While articles can be found through a manual search of journals, a much more reliable way to locate the articles is by consulting indices or abstracts. Indices and abstracts are used to identify useful published literature, prior to reading the article in full. Most disciplines publish indices and abstracts that summarise the literature published in journals relevant to the field. Some indices and abstracts are interdisciplinary and cover published material from a number of disciplines.

Indices include reference materials on books and periodicals. Identification of relevant material is by means of subject terms in the form of keywords or thesaurus terms. An index does not reproduce the article but provides the information required to locate the article: name of author(s), title of article, name of journal, volume, year and page numbers. Abstracts provide similar information, but in addition include a short summary on the purpose, methods and major findings of the research studies, rarely exceeding 150 words. This information is useful when the content of the article cannot be determined simply by reading the title.

Computer-assisted literature searches can also be used to identify relevant publications. Most libraries have access to computer-based bibliographic processing systems which contain a database of hundreds of thousands of articles published in journals and other literature. The information held in the computer database is similar to that found in the indices and abstracts.

Using primary and secondary sources

When accessing relevant material for your literature review it is important to be able to identify between *primary* and *secondary* sources. A *primary* source is considered to be firsthand information which is directly related to the topic and usually in form of an original article, paper or report. A *secondary* source is, as the terms indicates, a secondary source of information be it a report, thesis or paper that *refers to or comments on* research or published material that was not written by the author (Gay, Mills & Airasian 2006). Secondary sources can provide good leads for the researcher to follow up on primary sources. However, Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) make the point that novice researchers should not be satisfied with the information found only within secondary sources. This is because primary sources usually provide more detailed information, for example the original results of a study, and have often passed a reviewing process before publication as a report, journal article or book. There is a great difference between the direct outcomes of an empirical study, and opinion. As a reviewer, you are expected to provide critical discussion and cross investigation of the literature.

Online library catalogue access










In most libraries these days, the card catalogues of the past has been replaced with computer access to information about all types of resources held in the library, via individual terminals. These terminals allow the researcher to access information in other libraries and request inter-library-loans, should your institution have reciprocal agreements. These computer systems will provide information on the resources, the location and the availability.

When you are beginning your search of literature on a specific topic it is best to conduct a key-word search, which could be either broad or narrow depending on the topic and how much has been published. Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) suggest that if you need only a relatively small number of references but much has been published on the topic, then a narrow search will suffice. However, if you need a relatively large number of references and there is little published material available on your topic area, then you are better to take a broader search strategy. Conversely, if you have little idea of what published material is available on a topic, then you should start broadly and then narrow down your search.

The best way to broaden or narrow your literature search when using online or computer information systems, is to use *Boolean operators*. These are key words that instruct the program to include or exclude certain words in your search. These operators include words such as *and*, *or*, and *not* which are typed in upper case. Using these words between key search words will instruct the system to either narrow or broaden your search.

Many databases are available free online to browse via the Internet and do not require security protocols. A sample of these include the following:





Sample of database links (correct at the time of printing):

-  **Australia Libraries Gateway** – Access to the online catalogues of Australian libraries (<http://www.nla.gov.au/libraries/>)
-  **ERIC** (Education Resources Information Centre). A user friendly and easy access to education related literature. (<http://www.eric.ed.gov>)
-  **British Library Public Catalogue** – Access to the British Library catalogue (http://catalogue.bl.uk/F/?func=file&file_name=login-bl-list)
-  **BNF** – The online catalogue for the Bibliotheque Nationale de France. This link takes you to the English-language interface. (http://www.bnf.fr/pages/zNavigat/frame/version_anglaise.htm?ancre=english.htm)
-  **Library and Archives Canada.** (www.collectionscanada.ca/)
-  **LibDex** – The Library Index (www.libdex.com/)
-  **Canadian Library electronic collections.**
 (<http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/003/008/099/003008-disclaimer.html?orig=/e-coll-e/index-e.htm>)
-  **Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog** – The KVK is a meta-catalogue that allows for simultaneous searching of dozens of German-language library catalogues, among them the union catalogues for Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia and those for higher education institutions in Austria and Switzerland. Includes links to other national and union catalogues across the world. An excellent starting point for foreign-language research. (<http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/003/008/099/003008-disclaimer.html?orig=/e-coll-e/index-e.htm>)
-  **Libdex Index** of library home pages, Web-based catalogues and other resources. (<http://www.libdex.com/>)
-  **PsycINFO** – This is the online version of Psychological Abstracts and contains up to date summaries of journal articles, reports, chapters in books and books published in the field of psychology. (<http://www.apa.org/psycinfo>)
-  **PubMed** – This is a service of the US National Library of Medicine that includes over 16 million citations from MEDLINE and other life science journals. It is a free access database that searches the most common scientific journals relating to medicine, nursing, psychology and other related health areas. (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?DB=pubmed>)
-  **National Library of Australia** – Free web access to the catalogue of Australia's leading public research library. (<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>)

- ❖ **Libraries Australia** – Libraries Australia provides access to Australia’s National Bibliographic Database, the combined holdings of the major Australian libraries (university libraries, state libraries and other major research libraries). Use it to find which libraries in Australia hold books and journals. (<http://librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au>)
- ❖ **Library of Congress** – Web access to the catalogue of one of the world’s great libraries (<http://catalog.loc.gov/>)
- ❖ **LibWeb Links** to international library catalogues on the Web. (<http://lists.webjunction.org/libweb/>)
- ❖ **NewJour** This site provides an excellent up to date listing of journals on almost any subject. The site will also tell you if the journal you are searching is currently available on the web and provides direct links to journal home pages. (<http://gort.ucsd.edu/newjour/>)
- ❖ **Open WorldCat** – Search the holdings of the 23,000 libraries are participating in the Open WorldCat program. WorldCat holds over 1 billion items. (<http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/dotorg/default.htm>)
- ❖ **Uncover Periodical Index** This database provides a brief description about specific articles from more than 17,000 different multidisciplinary journals. By registering (fee required), UnCover REVEAL will send automated alerting for the journals of your choice. (<http://www.unm.edu/~brosen/uncover.htm>)
- ❖ **Worldcat** – is the world’s largest network of library content and services. Here it is possible to search for popular books, music CDs and videos. It is also possible to search for many new kinds of digital content such as downloadable audiobooks. It is also possible to find article abstracts, authoritative research materials including documents and photos. (www.worldcat.org/)

Useful Web Search Engines include:







- ❖ **Google** – Google is one of the better and most popular Web search tools. It searches large databases with excellent results. Database also include PDF files, however, caution should applied in the use of Google as a search engine because it searches web pages without any guarantee of the accuracy for the information retrieved. (<http://www.google.com.au/>)
- ❖ **Google Book Search** – Google Book Search is a Beta version of a Google based search engine and enables you to search the full-text of books. These are mostly from a range of mainly US-based publishers. (<http://books.google.com/>)
- ❖ **Google Scholar** – Google Scholar search engine allows you to search specifically for scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, preprints, abstracts and technical reports. Google Scholar also accesses non-peer reviewed publications and care need to be taken when citing these publications. (<http://scholar.google.com/>)
- ❖ **Scirus** – is a science-specific search engine from Elsevier Science that searches Web pages, journal citations and non-text files. (<http://www.scirus.com/srsapp/>)

-  **Amazon** – this is a commercial supplier of books, CD's videos etc, and is accessed via the internet. Amazon, however, can be a good tool for providing details of the latest books published in almost any subject area. They also make suggestions in terms of other publications based on the fact that people who purchased the book you may be looking to buy, also bought other suggested titles in the same topic area. This can help you to locate new and seminal books which can provide good leads for tracking down literature. (<http://www.amazon.com/>)
-  **Dogpile** – searches Google, Yahoo, LookSmart, ArkJeeves/Teoma, Google ADS, MSN search. Sites that have purchased ranking and inclusion are blended in. (www.dogpile.com)
-  **Mamma.com** is a meta search engine. Each time you type a query mamma simultaneously searches a variety of engines, directories, and deep content sites, properly formats the words and syntax for each, compiles their results in a virtual database, eliminates duplicates, and displays them in a uniform manner according to relevance. (www.mamma.com)
-  **Geocities.com** – evaluates the quality of internet sources: consolidates listing of evaluation criteria and quality indicators. (www.geocities.com/nqiya/Criteria.html)

Identifying quality academic journals

An academic journal is ideally one that is peer reviewed. This not only implies the status of the journal but demonstrates that the contents have been assessed by relevant experts in the field of study. Usually this is done outside the editorship of the journal, although many journals do have editorial boards that provide expertise in the review process. When reviewing literature, it is important that the literature is legitimate and withstands rigorous scrutiny.

Ask yourself the following questions in regard to the literature:

-  Is the publication from a known journal in the field, or a reputable publisher?
-  Does the publication provide details of the authorship, date of publication and affiliation information of the author(s)?
-  Does the publication present facts based on evidence as opposed to subjective interpretation?
-  Does the publication provide information on the background, purpose and nature of the research question?
-  Is the research scientific in terms of presentation of facts and discussion of outcomes? If it is a journal article, are there sections including abstract, methodology, data presentation, discussion of finding?
-  How recent is the publication? Is the publication being discussed in other key journals, books, reports?

Many online indexes such as *ProQuest* and *Expanded Academic* give you the choice of limiting your literature search to only scholarly journals which are peer reviewed. Others include *SpringerLink*, *Wiley*, *InterScience*, *Emerald* and *JSTOR*.

Hittleman and Simon (2006) suggest that novice researchers employ a three part strategy for the reading of research reports which they describe as including prereading, reading and postreading. They explain this as the research consumer recalling what he or she knows about the topic, then developing a purpose for reading the report. The researcher should systematically read parts of the report according to their own interests and then decide if the report matches or relates to their own purpose. Hittleman and Simon remind us that it is the editors of journals and authors of books in which the reports are published who determine the content and length of the research reports. As research consumers we need to be mindful of the subjective nature of reporting and our own interpretation when reading which will change as we become more immersed in the literature.

What information to collect

Once you have located literature material on a topic, the next task is to read and extract the relevant information from these sources. This poses another challenge. How do you retain this information given the fact that you may have read hundreds of articles?

One strategy to manage large amounts of literature is to photocopy and keep all the original articles relating to your study. This way, you will be able to keep hardcopy file records of the material. This system also allows you to either highlight sections of the text or attach annotated notes which will be useful later when you are writing up the review of the literature.

The first step in reviewing the literature involves reading the reports. Reports often follow a logical progression of ideas and arguments. The reader is provided with information about the following:

- Statement of the problem
- General question(s) asked
- Theoretical position
- Choice of research design and method
- Choice of sample
- Presentation of findings
- A discussion of the implications of the results.

When you read each report, it is helpful if you keep notes on each of these categories. These should be summarised in your own words rather than those of the authors. A system for recording your literature review notes can be organised electronically in *Endnote*, or in a way that is most useful to you. If direct quotes will be used at a later date, make sure you copy the information and the reference details (for example, page numbers) accurately. If you do not record this information, you will find yourself making another trip to the library. Use quotation marks to indicate the quoted material.

Writers often describe the statement of the problem and the question(s) asked in the first page of the report. You should note the focus of the study and the theoretical perspective used by the author in a paragraph or two. Although most research reports provide a theoretical perspective that serves as a basis for the study, not every researcher makes it clear which perspective they have used in the study. Finding and analysing the theoretical perspective of a study can be tricky. Researchers often include a discussion of the theoretical perspective for a study among other information in the introductory materials. It is important that you try to decipher the theoretical basis of the study by examining and identifying underlying assumptions to the study and how these link to the broader universe of knowledge.

You should also note the substantive literature which is reviewed. Although references will appear throughout the text, particular attention should be paid to the literature that is used to substantiate the conceptual or content area of the study. This literature is easy to find because most reports begin with a substantive literature review. It is part of the background information of the report. Some substantive literature can also be found in the 'Discussion' or 'Implications' sections of the report. Your task is to note what material has been included, and assess how the literature presented has been used to provide a rationale for the problem statement. It is useful to double check the reference list as closer scrutiny might provide key leads to other publications which are directly related to your own research question.

Most reports include a separate section on methods. Your literature review notes should include a few sentences that summarise the methodological design of the study. This includes assessing the appropriateness of the research design to the question asked and evaluating sampling, data analysis and ethical issues. Did the study use a qualitative or quantitative design? A longitudinal or cross-sectional approach? Were structured or unstructured interviews conducted? Was the research design descriptive, exploratory or experimental? What sampling framework was used? What ethical issues were raised?

The final paragraphs of the literature review card can be used to briefly summarise the main findings, and the conclusions and/or implications of the study. You might also include reflections on how the report has influenced your thoughts on the topic. These comments can be included under the category of Ideas.

The main purpose of the literature review is to examine how your proposed study can fit into a broader knowledge base. In order to achieve this goal, you will need to identify the strengths and gaps in the current knowledge base. This requires an

understanding of what was studied and how it was done. It was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter that, as a critic, you can learn much from the success and failure of other researchers' efforts. The main objectives are to identify theoretical, methodological and substantive contributions of a study so that these can be incorporated into your work, and to note the gaps in existing knowledge so that you legitimate your planned work. This analysis can assist you to identify productive avenues for further investigations, to place your study in context of existing knowledge, and to ask questions which have not been addressed in the literature to date.

For example, consider the following paper outlined in Figure 2.1. When reviewing papers in preparation for writing a literature review it is important to make note of the abstract. Does the abstract information provide cross-links with the focus of your research topic? What theoretical framework and methodology is used in the particular study? Consider how appropriate the methodology is for the study. What are the main findings and what are the key discussion points that arise from the data? What do you consider are the limitations of the study?

Hittleman and Simon (2006) suggest you ask yourself the following questions upon reading a research report in preparation for writing a literature review. These include:

- What are the key issues and questions being asked by the researchers?
- What have other researchers discovered about these issues?
- What were the questions the researchers tried to answer?
- What kind of research was conducted?
- What type of methodologies were employed?
- Are the findings relevant in terms of my own research topic?

Figure 2.1 An example of literature review notes

Source: Hays ,T. and V. Minichiello (2005). ‘The contribution of music to quality of life in older people: An Australian qualitative study.’ *Ageing and Society* 25(2): 261-278.

(1 of 4)

Research question:

The study examines the personal meaning and importance of music in the lives of older people, paying particular attention to the ways music contributes to self-identity and quality of life. It also uses a sociological approach to investigate how music can be used to provide people with ways of knowing and being in the world and of understanding emotions, *self*, others and interpreting the meaning of life experiences.

Key words: music, quality of life, well being, identity, health

Hays & Minichiello Article

(2 of 4)

Method:

The data is derived from qualitative interviews, including two focus groups and 56 in-depth interviews with a sample of older Australians aged 65 years and over living in rural and urban settings. The informants were drawn from various backgrounds and included older people who had no training in music, those who had some training and those who had been professional musicians. The analysis of the data focussed on thematic discovery from the transcripts recorded through the interviews with the informants. This included themes around identity, well-being, connection, spirituality, and the benefits of music. This was achieved using the methodological principles of open and axial coding. There were four rounds of interviews and, within each round, data collection centred on emerging themes, issues or ideas grounded in the data.

Hays & Minichiello Article

(3 of 4)

Results:

The findings reveal that music provides people with ways of understanding and developing their self-identity, connecting with other people, maintaining well-being, experiencing and expressing spirituality, and providing strong associations and memories with a person's life process. The data are used to illustrate how older people achieve these outcomes. The results also show that music can promote quality of life by contributing to positive self-esteem, helping people feel competent and independent, and lessening feelings of isolation and loneliness. This results show that music can be used to maintain and promote a better quality of life for older people, and this is illustrated with quotes from the informants to support this claim. A major contribution of the study is that it highlights the subjective experience of the meaning of music and through such meaning we gain insight into the person's self.

Hays & Minichiello Article

(4 of 4)

Notes:

- The paper looks at the psychosocial perspective of music in the lives of older people.
- The authors use a symbolic interaction framework for the study, and use a qualitative methodology to collect the data by way of focus groups and in-depth interviews.
- The paper looks at identity, *self*, well-being and quality of life for older music which is facilitated by music.
- The researcher recruited informants by using *snowballing* technique, personal referrals, community centre.
- The musical background of the participants varied from professional, amateur, non skilled or musically educated.
- A limitation of the study is gender imbalance, ethnic background, age groups for older people.

Hays & Minichiello Article



(4 of 4 continued)

Questions to follow-up:

The authors note that further studies are needed to elaborate on the ways in which music is used throughout the life span to interpret emotions, experiences, interactions with people and a sense of identity. In particular, further exploration of how music can provide sociological insights into what social purposes it serves as a feature of human agency. For example, do different types of music appeal to certain groups of people, and is it used by these groups to reinforce and validate their world-views? Are there differences between how different cultures use music, so that people can make connections with themselves and others, and what is the significance of the differences or similarities found between cultures in the use of various types of music? The meaning of music is not entirely arbitrary or individual, but influenced by the symbolic communication found in society. This suggests that in addition to understanding the individual meaning and experience people give to music—the focus of this study—other studies are required to understand how music serves as a structural and social construct representation, the extent to which it is embedded in cultural assumptions and influences social meanings.

**ACTIVITIES**

Select 3 journal articles directly related to a topic of interest to you. This could be a research question which you are thinking of exploring. Enter the relevant data into your copy of the *Endnote* program on your computer. Include all the important information including authors, title of paper, title of journal, year of publication, page numbers, etc. (If you use an online journal all of this information, including the abstract may be directly transferable to the *Endnote* library. A note of caution, do not download articles into your library if you have not read them. This will only confuse you later when retrieving information. The authors recommend you set up two libraries in this case. The first library can be potential material for later use, and the second as the real library, which includes all relevant and read material).

-  While reading the articles, note for each one, the author's research questions, the methodologies used to collect the data, and the key findings and discussion.
-  When were the papers published? What theoretical perspective does the author/researcher bring to the study?

- Look for similarities in terms of research question, methodology used, data source and characteristics of sample, and findings discussed. Do the papers produce any cross commentary on the topic? Do they have different perspectives?
- What are the methodological designs of the studies discussed in the papers? Note the appropriateness of the research design to the question asked in terms of evaluating the sampling, data analysis and ethical issues.
- Do the studies use a qualitative or quantitative design? Do they use a longitudinal or cross-sectional approach? Were the interviews conducted structured or unstructured? Was the research design descriptive, exploratory or experimental? What sampling framework was used? What ethical issues are raised?
- What do you see as the limitations of the papers you are reading? What information is missing and/or needs further clarification? What assumptions have the authors made in terms of the research that is not entirely evident in the data?

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