



Reviewing Literature critically and purposefully

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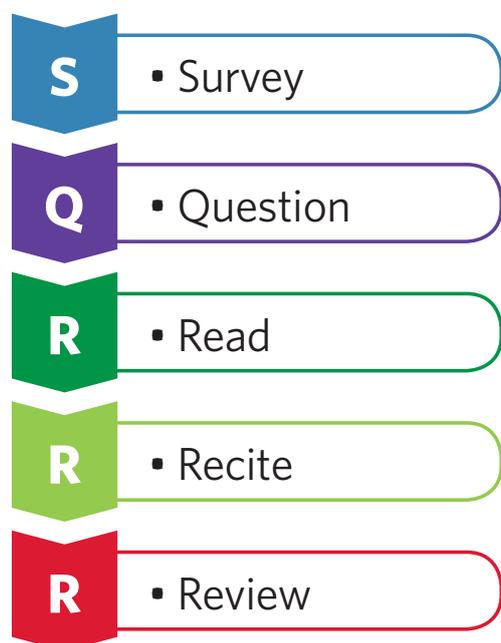
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1. Reading quickly and purposefully

As part of your study you need to read a lot of different materials. However, it is impossible and also not very useful to read everything thoroughly which might leave you worried that you might miss important information.

There are techniques to help you read more quickly and purposefully. We will introduce one of the most successful ones:

SQ3R



S	Quick survey of the text: identify headings and sub-headings
Q	While reading quickly through, start asking yourself some questions , e.g. convert (sub-) headings into questions like: What is the chapter about?
R1	Read the text again, this time more carefully to answer the questions from above
R2	After finishing reading, try to recall/recite the main points/questions
R3	Check if you have recalled the information correctly by reviewing the points/answers to the questions

In order to be able to critically appraise the article(s), you need to provide evidence of critical thinking and apply critical analysis in a balanced and objective manner.

It is essential therefore to **recognise, analyse** and **evaluate** the **reasoning** and **forms of arguments** in texts. When you are reading critically you are giving a personal response to what has been written, but this response requires to be supported by **evidence**.

Evidence is research findings that must be substantiated. For more on how to analyse evidence in a paper refer to the hand-out - *How to review a research paper*.

2. Formulating Questions for your Reading

When carrying out a literature review, you are expected to read a selection of texts.

Moreover, you should relate the different articles / book chapters etc. to each other. You need to indicate their **similarities, differences, contradictions** and perhaps indicate **what is missing**.

When you are critically reading you **must not** accept things as being true, merely because it has been published.

You need to explain clearly to your reader the **values, theories, methods** that have informed you when reading the text.

Before you start reading you might want to consider:

- What vocabulary has been used in the text as all of these may have affected the meaning. Are the authors: **stating/asserting/claiming/contending/concluding**?
- What is the background of the text/writer/journal? For example is the writer a respected researcher? Or is s/he qualified in his or her field. Alternatively, is the journal particularly noted in its field? Can you be sure that the text you are reading is from a reliable source?



Please note that even though the article may have been on the Internet or published in a journal, the article may not be well researched.

3. Assessing and Evaluating Arguments as Part of your Literature Review

While reading the over-arching questions in your head should be:

- 'What is the underlying message in the text?'
- 'What reasons or evidence is the text using to support the argument, so that I accept or believe this?'

Within the text, search for the conclusion and reasons by looking for the '**conclusion indicators**'. This will include words such as:

- *Therefore, thus, in short, altogether, overall, thus we can see that, on the whole, to summarise.*

At the same time look for '**reason indicators**'. Words that are used are:

- *Because, for, since, and/or, therefore, as a result; accordingly, it is evident that; for this reason; according to X; this suggests that.*

Evaluate what you have read:

- How would you find out further information so that you can evaluate the truth of the argument?
- How can you assess the reliability of the journal or the author(s)?
- When assessing the conclusion, is there any additional evidence that strengthens or weakens the conclusion?
- Is there anything in the text which may be true?
- Is there anything in the text that you know is true?
- Have you assessed how believable/reasonable/convincing the arguments are that you have identified?
- How appropriate are your arguments when compared with other texts and or situations?
- Can you draw any conclusion from the text(s)? If so, do they suggest that the reasoning in the text may be faulty in any way?
- Do any of the reasons or assumptions cover a general principle? Have you evaluated these?
- Does the reasoning support the conclusion in the text appropriately? If not can you explain the ways in which the reasoning is flawed?

4. Considering Research Methods in your Literature Review

It is important that you **critically examine** and **evaluate** the **research methods** used in the research you are reviewing.

This involves **identifying strengths, weaknesses and limitations** of the research methods used. You may also be expected to submit your own research as part of your assignment. This will in all probability, include a methods section.

Reading about different methods of research will help you decide upon the most appropriate one for your own research.

Refer to your *indicative reading list* and or the *Research Methods module* for further guidance. Link to reading List page on GCU Library.

<https://gcu.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/leganto/readinglist/searchlists>

Generally: The article or research paper may include results from **quantitative** or **qualitative** research.

'Quantitative research is empirical research where the data are in the form of numbers. Qualitative research is empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers.'

(Punch 2005, cited in Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010, p64)

The research approaches may have used methods such as action research, case studies, experiments, surveys, interviews, observation or questionnaires.

In your critical reading ask yourself the following questions:

- Which methods have been used in the text?
- What are the advantages of the methods that have been selected?
- What are the disadvantages?
- What other methods could have been used?