Literature Review

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• Have a well defined topic
• Have a well defined question
• In theory, you must read everything ever written on this topic and question
• What is the current state of knowledge
• How does the literature answer the question?
• What are the strengths and weaknesses of the literature?
• How are you going to move the literature forward?
Literature Review

A literature review both discusses and critically evaluates the current literature on a chosen topic.

- Extensively research the literature and critically evaluate its quality.
- Describe what others have discovered, and view that work with your own insights.
- Present, analyze, and synthesize material from a range of sources.
- Have clear focus and direction.
- Present material in a logical, clear, and well organized manner.

How to Write a Lit Review

- Have someone else do the work
  - Look at textbooks
    - Chapters, footnotes, bibliography
  - Look at *Journal of Economic Literature*
    - Specialists inform non-specialists about the current state of knowledge
    - Some articles have bibliographies with over 100 entries
  - Some journals specialize
    - Monetary policy – *Federal Reserve Bulletin*
    - Labor market – *Monthly Labor Review*
    - Legal Institutions – *Journal of Law and Economics*
How to Write a Lit Review

• Review the literature
  – ECONLIT
    • All newly published articles and books in economics
    • If it is not in ECONLIT, it is not economics.
  – JSTOR
    • Five year firewall
  – Social Science Citation Index
    • Which articles are the most important?
  – NBER Working Papers
    • Most current research

How to Write a Lit Review

• Citing References
  – “Michael (1998) states that the sky is blue.”
  – “Bernstam and Swan (1986) finds that X causes Y.”
How to Write a Lit Review

• Organize the Literature review by
  – Chronology
  – Theoretical Perspective
  – Order of Importance
  – Methodological Type
  – Any structure that is logical and fits the contents

• Lit review is NOT a list of the literature
  – Discussion of similarities and differences
  – Discussion of strengths and weaknesses
  – Compare and contrast
  – Critically review and comment on the relative merits

How to Write a Lit Review

• Have a clear line of argument
• Avoid plagiarism
  – Use citations and footnotes
  – Separate your ideas from authors’ ideas