Creating a Literature Review Outline
by the Walden Dissertation Editors

Use this SMRTguide to great the headings and outline for the capstone literature review.

Check out our Form and Style Editor’s Proposal Starter Kit, in general, as well as the specific information on writing the literature review. Viewing this first will help with the basics and orientation to writing about the literature. Also, be sure to review the Capstone Webinar on Reviewing the Literature.

Basic Outline: Consider the general outline for a literature review.

- Introduction
- Search Strategy
- Main Topic 1
  - Subtopic
  - Subtopic
- Main Topic 2
  - Subtopic
  - Subtopic
- Main topic 3
- Main Topic 4
  - Subtopic
  - Subtopic
- Methods-specific literature
- Conclusion (leading to rationale for your study)

Note: There is no magic number of headings, topics, or subheadings. All are dependent on the specific topic. Remember that the purpose of the literature is two-fold: (a) to demonstrate familiarity with all of the relevant research on the topic (i.e., present an exhaustive and comprehensive review); and (b) to demonstrate expertise on all of this information in the process of achieving the highest degree in the field (i.e., present a synthesized discussion in the writer’s own voice and an analysis evaluating the previous research).
Basic Example:

The headings in the literature review signal the main areas of the literature that will be covered and should align specifically with the main ideas of the problem statement.

For instance:

Writing about the problem of corporate bullying and how an ombudsperson may be effective in mitigating corporate bullying, the writer needs to consider the main ideas involved as the guide to the lit review outline.

The main ideas involved here are:

- Conflict
- Bullying
- Conflict management/mitigation
- Ombudspeople

The writer will want to ensure that these main ideas are the main elements/headings of the literature review.

What heading should I use in my lit review?

- Examine your topic and construct a working outline for the lit review
- Think of the main headings and subheadings that make sense (based on variables or constructs)
  - Variables (quan)
  - Constructs (qual)

Specific Example:

Now, consider the main concepts or variables in a problem statement—go through and circle or highlight:

U.S. firms have increasingly adopted and implemented flexible work policies that allow employees some amount of freedom in their work hours, structure or schedule, or daily routines. According to Bond, Galinsky, Kim, and Brownfield (2005)’s national survey of private sector worksites with 100+ employees, 68% of companies offered flextime, 35% allowed telework for at least some employees, 39% had compressed work week options, 53% had reduced hours options, and 46% had job-sharing programs. Companies such as Best Buy and Yahoo have begun a recent trend in revoking workplace flexibility options, a move that many new college grads may not appreciate. The general business problem is that, although companies Like Best Buy and Yahoo may believe that workplace flexibility is bad for the bottom line, it is an open question as to whether productivity actually increases when workers are granted more autonomy over their work schedules. The specific business problem is that Best Buy has officially removed all flexible work options, and managers do not know how to anticipate the ramifications of this on their teams’ productivity and performance.

Do this in your own problem statement.
This writer might start with the concepts (drawn from the Problem Statement):

- Flexible work policies
- Work schedules/shifts
- Productivity and performance
- Autonomy

These are the starting points for headings but, remember: *Jumping right into these may not be the best idea*. Consider: *What does the reader need to know FIRST, before understanding the specific ideas regarding these topics?*

- **Organizational Policies**
  - Working from home and Remote workers
  - Flexible schedules and flextime

- **Work Schedules and Shifts**
  - Working part time
  - Job sharing
  - Compressed work weeks

- **Productivity and Performance**
  - Organizational and employee performance
  - Job satisfaction and performance

- **Autonomy**
  - Job satisfaction and autonomy
  - Autonomy and performance

- **Previous Research Approaches to Studying Flexible Work**
  - Qual vs. Quant
  - Similar studies to proposal
Steps and Strategies for Creating the Outline:

1. Pull out the key words, topics, themes, from the problem statement.

2. What larger area of study are those associated with?
   a. Can these concepts stand on their own, or are they part of a larger topic area/umbrella that should be covered first?
   b. Basically, what (if anything) do you need to address in your study in order to get there?

3. Begin with the broadest ideas and narrow down to what is specific to your study.
   a. See the inverted triangle in the Proposal Starter Kit Literature Review pages.

4. Always search, revise, change, reorder as you go
   a. Add, move, remove, combine, or otherwise revise headings as needed

5. Think about what you want to be able to say, does the literature support that?

6. Create this outline BEFORE writing and or before writing annotated bibliographies.

7. Write one search/section at a time.

Contact editor@waldenu.edu with questions about preparing the proposal and final doctoral capstone document for submission.