Literature Reviews

Why would you care what other writers have written?

Dalhousie Writing Centre
In almost the beginning was the literature review

- Why bother?
- What is the lit review?
- Where do I start?
- How do I keep track of sources?
- Is there an organizational pattern (structure) to follow?
- How do I know when I am done?
“If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants.”

- Google Scholar’s motto
- Oasis (2000)
- British two pound coin
- S.T. Coleridge (1828)
- Isaac Newton (1676)
- George Herbert (1651)
- Didacus Stella (16th century)
- Bernard of Chartres (before 1159)

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stand_on_the_shoulders_of_giants)

Indicates: information seeking skills and critical appraisal ability
What is a lit review?

- Discusses published information
- Looks at a particular subject area (a problem)
- Limits itself by topic and/or time period
- Uses an organizational pattern
- Is usually both a summary and a synthesis of ideas/arguments
- Varies in length
- Provides a background and a platform from which to jump off into your topic
It must ...

According to Taylor & Proctor (2006), a literature review must:

- Be organized and related directly to the thesis or research question you are developing
- Synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known
- Identify areas of controversy in the literature
- Formulate questions that need further research

From
http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review
So where do I start? At the beginning

1. Find models (in your discipline(s))

2. Narrow your topic and construct a working thesis (limit the idea)
   - The rate of adoption of post-20th century forestry practices depends on labour supply and class structure

3. Read with the research question in mind

4. Create an outline
   - Introduction – quick idea of the topic
   - Body – discussion organized chronologically, thematically, or methodologically
   - Conclusion/Recommendations – where should the work go from here?
How do I keep track of sources?

- RefWorks or Endnote
- Follow your pattern of organization (group sources according to your pattern)
- Use Insert/Comment while writing
- Check at the end to ensure proper handling of source material
Is there an organizational pattern (structure) to follow?

- Basic Intro/Body/Conclusion
- The Body: chronological
  - publication
  - trend (history)
  - theme
  - methodology
  - discipline

Write each section as soon as possible so that you remember the material. Note ideas that you would like to mention in a subsequent analysis or discussion.
You know you are done if you have ....

- Positioned your research question in the discipline (you’ve discussed what has already been done on this question)
- Convinced the reader that you know where you are going on this question
- Fulfilled all the requirements of the assignment as detailed by your department (word count, type of review)
- Checked the accuracy of your sources, etc.
- Spent time reviewing and revising your work

Then you are done! Now the real work starts.
Resources

- Your thesis supervisor
- Your subject librarian
- The Writing Centre
- Internet sites such as
  - http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html
  - http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/apa/interact/lit/index.html