

Literature Review: Planning

There are two main kinds of literature review. One is a substantial chapter of a higher degree by research. The other is just an essay that 'reviews the literature'. All essays should review literature but an essay tasked with this should do so in detail.

Planning for a literature review is important to ensure that the review follows a clear structure.

Steps to planning

Write annotated bibliographies

The first step is to write a number of annotated bibliography entries for each article you plan to review (see helpsheet, *Annotated Bibliography*). This essentially summarises each article and comments on its relevance to your topic. You should be able to see common themes in the arguments the authors provide. The next step is the 'Yes-No' method.

Apply the 'Yes-No' method

This method involves setting out the literature into categories. Suppose your topic is: 'Everyone has the right to die in a manner and time of their choosing. Discuss'. This topic will need to review the positions for and against euthanasia.

- '*YES*' literature agrees with the statement above and offers arguments and evidence to support it.
- '*NO*' literature does the same in opposition to the statement.
- '*Yes BUT*' literature is on the 'YES' side of the debate but raises major concerns or reservations about it (e.g., they may think euthanasia should be permitted by law but needs strong legislative restrictions to avoid a 'slippery slope' of undesired terminations).
- '*No BUT*' literature is on the 'NO' side of the debate but has majors concerns or reservations about it (e.g., they might think it should be permitted in some special cases when palliative care is not working).

This schema can be more subtle too, e.g., you might also include 'NO but (i.e., small but)' and 'YES but' literature (i.e., these are closer to the 'NO' and 'YES' positions and have fewer reservations or concerns). Set out the literature so you are clear who says what.

THE 'YES-NO' METHOD: Put your topic or question here

YES	<i>Yes BUT</i>	<i>No BUT</i>	NO
(Jamison, 2012)	(Anderson, 2018)	(Hilderguard, 2019)	(Kennedy, 2017)
(Henrix, 2019)	(Jones, 2016)	(Bonsin, 2011)	(Franks, 2015)

Moving from this to actually writing the review might seem like a daunting task, but it can be made easier by producing discrete summaries, using the Yes-No method and following this with an outline.

Write an Outline

The final step in planning is to design a writing outline that will give shape to your essay. A good way to think of this is as a series of nested categories with 'vertical' and 'horizontal' axes. An example is provided overleaf.

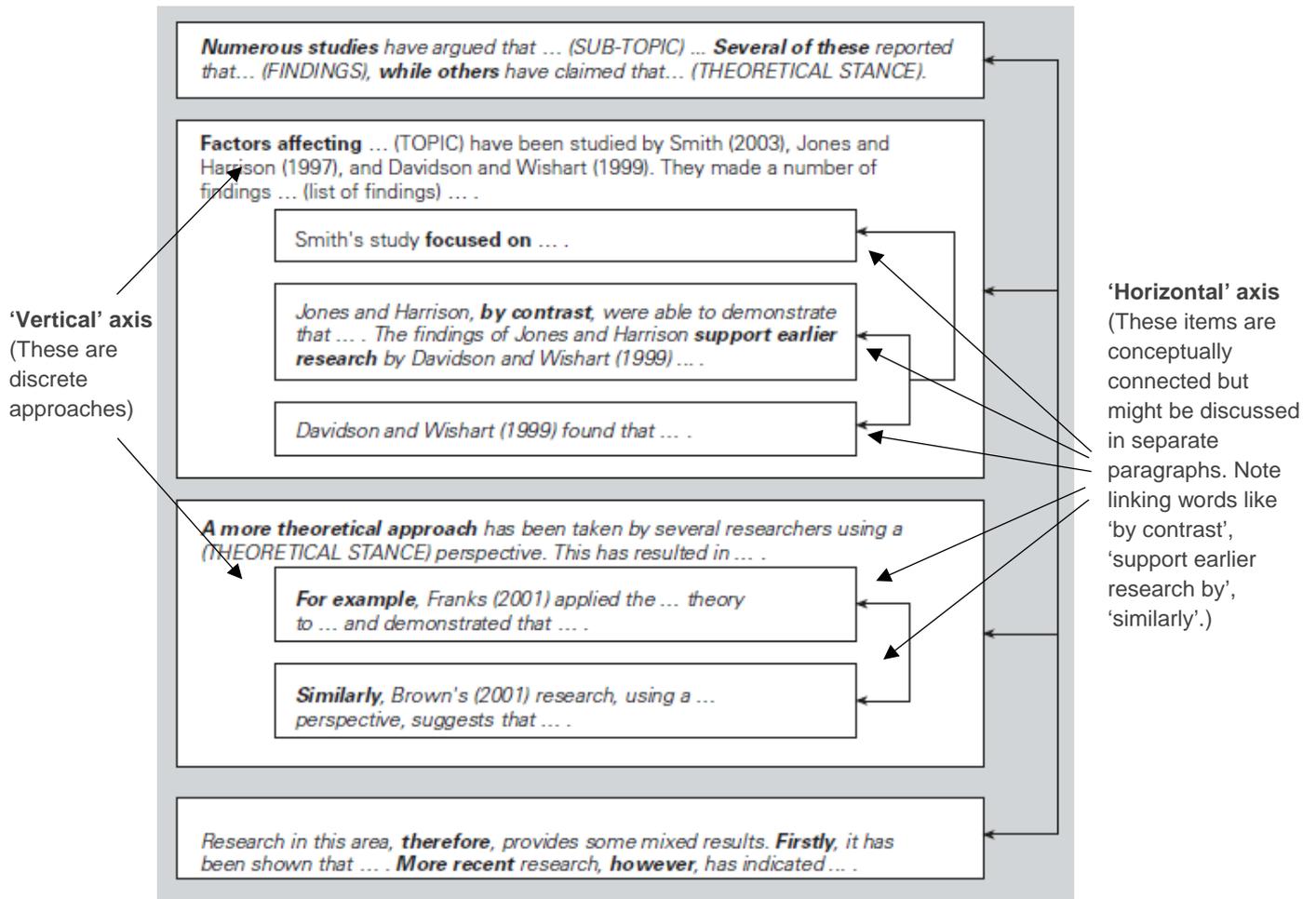
The 'vertical' axis in the example includes literature about the a) Findings and b) Theoretical stance on a given (unidentified) topic. These might be 'sub-topics' of a larger issue.

The nested 'horizontal' axis outlines various positions on a) and b). They are 'horizontal' as they can be discussed in relationship to one another in the same, but usually separate, paragraphs. In the Findings

literature, for example, they might be separated by type of finding—as they are here—or discussed in terms of chronological development (earlier to later), differences of approach, or in many other ways.

Using the example discussed on the previous page, the ‘vertical’ categories can be: a) Literature supporting euthanasia, b) Literature in opposition to euthanasia, and c) Literature supportive/against euthanasia, but with reservations. The ‘horizontal’ categories would be various arguments or evidence-based considerations for each position.

This outline forms the first draft of your literature review!



Notice the introductory comments that set up the discussion. This can be part of the introduction to your overall essay. In addition, there could be separate mini-introductions to various parts of a literature review. The concluding comments could also be part of your essay or conclude a small section of a larger review.

Other helpsheets available

- Literature Review: Detailed
- Writing in an Academic Style
- Paraphrasing
- Literature Review: Structure
- Incorporating Evidence into your Writing