Transcript

Chapter 5: Conducting a Literature Search

Perhaps the most common problem of literature searching is the feeling that, on the one hand, there is just too much to read, and on the other, not enough about your particular interest!

And literature searching is always a delicate balance act between too much and too little - and in an increasingly information-rich world, the scales are very easy to tip in either direction and this can often feel quite overwhelming, particularly at the start of the project. But with a bit of knowledge and practice, you can navigate the literature much more easily than you might initially think. And basically, there are four key aspects of doing a good literature search for a dissertation:

* Planning
* Reading
* Refining
* (Repeat)

Now, literature searching is a dynamic process; you need to work out what you are looking for, read and respond to what you find, and then alter your searches accordingly. In the social sciences, you don’t often get it right first time, so be prepared to take the time to develop your search strategy.

It’s also worth mentioning that although you have a huge repository of material available at the touch of a button, sometimes hand searching can be incredibly productive. So, take the time to work out where items of interest are available in your library and go and see which books are near them on the shelves. Look at the contents, skim read introductions, and use indexes to identify relevant material. Also hand search key journals by again looking at the contents pages to identify relevant articles. And finally, do citation searches on any key publications you find, and be prepared to ‘reference raid’ - look at what they reference, read it if it looks useful, and do citation searches on any useful material found.

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