TOWARD THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the lit review is to ground your project in a particular field and demonstrate how you will enter into that intellectual conversation.

I. Considering your intervention
In order to write an effective literature review, you must consider what kind of intervention you want your project to make in your field.¹ Broadly speaking, you can:
   1. address a gap,
   2. correct previous research, or
   3. extending previous research.

The content and organization of your literature review should prepare the way for your argument. After reading the lit review, your reader should be ready to understand why your argument is an original and necessary contribution to an ongoing scholarly conversation.

II. Considering your field or topic
One approach suggests a list of questions that you may ask about your topic or field:²

Some of the questions the review of the literature can answer


¹ Belcher, 49-51.
² The Learning Centre's "Getting Started on Your Literature Review." http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/litrev.html
Here is another set of questions to help you decide what to include in your literature review.\textsuperscript{3}

1. What is my central question or issue that the literature can help define?
2. What is already known about the topic?
3. Is the scope of the literature being reviewed wide or narrow enough?
4. Is there a conflict or debate in the literature?
5. What connections can be made between the texts being reviewed?
7. What criteria should be used to evaluate the literature being reviewed?
8. How will reviewing the literature justify the topic I plan to investigate?

Considering your individual sources
Everything you include in your lit review needs to fulfill a function for your argument. Generally, they fall into three categories, with several sub-categories as applicable. Rudestam and Newton articulate it through a cinematic analogy:\textsuperscript{4}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>single concept / topic</th>
<th>more than one concept similar methodologies</th>
<th>highest intersection of concepts and methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long shot</td>
<td>Medium Range</td>
<td>Close-ups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>older to newer (tends to be older)</td>
<td>older to newer</td>
<td>tends to be newer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Category 1: Long shots. For background material and context—summary of relevant literature that needs to be referenced but not analyzed.
Category 2: Medium shots. Requires short descriptions or analyses; covers research that addresses the relationship of two different facets of your project.
Category 3: Close-ups. Detailed analysis of closely related studies with direct relevance for your research question, or that you might consider the basis for your study. These studies cover research that addresses the most central aspects of your argument or provide you with an example of the methodology you will use.

\textsuperscript{3} Clark, 110-111.
Writing the literature review

Stage 1: Take your annotated sources out of whatever order they're currently in and organize them in two ways:

a) how you use them (according to the "shots" analogy)

b) what main themes they touch upon that are major themes for your project.

Stage 2: Consult your outline, particularly your chapter breakdowns:

a) can you place each of these sources somewhere in that document?

b) are there a clump of sources that you can put into conversation?

The latter might constitute a promising lit review section. You might consider thinking of a very loose "narrative" for your lit review. That is, while you are considering previous scholarship, you still have to find a way to claim it for your purposes and lead your reader through it in such a way that s/he is prepared to see how your work pertains to the discussion of previous research.

Revising the literature review: rhetoric

Writing lit reviews is like a swamp in which your voice will get lost and die if you aren't careful. Do not worry if your first draft feels a bit book-report-ish, but in later drafts, you will want to a) restructure paragraphs so that the topic sentence explains why your argument profits from an exploration of this particular secondary source, and b) rewrite sentences so that they continue to sound like the language you use throughout the rest of your writing.

As you write, you might consider two different approaches to the literature you will work with:

1. Summarizing their work accurately
2. Diverging from their work in order to create your own intellectual space.

Graff & Birkenstein write about the art of summarizing and the importance of retaining voice:

- "As a general rule, a good summary requires balancing what the original author is saying with the writer's own focus. ... Striking this delicate balance can be tricky, since it means facing two ways at once: both outward (toward the author being summarized) and inward (toward yourself). Ultimately, it means being respectful of others while simultaneously structuring how you summarize them in light of your own text's central claim" (29).
- "Once a summary enters your text, you should think of it as joint property—reflecting both the source you are summarizing and you yourself" (34).

Introducing Summaries and Quotations (165-66)

"X acknowledges that _______.

"X denies/does not deny that ____.

"X celebrates the fact that _______.

"X deplores the tendency to _______.

"X questions whether ________.

"X refutes the claim that _______.

"X reminds us that ________.

"X argues that ________.

"X claims that ________.

"X observes that ________.

"X reports that ________.

"X suggests that ________.

"X emphasizes that ________.

"X concedes that ________.

"X demonstrates that ________.

Booth, Colomb, and Williams recommend nuanced ways of contradicting secondary sources in order to assert your own argument (p. 72-74).

Contradictions of Kind
"You claim that something thought to be one kind of thing is not (or vice versa)."

Part-Whole Contradictions
"You claim that others mistake the relationship among the parts of something.
1. Though X seems not to be a part of Y, it is.
2. Though part X seems to relate to part Y in Z way, it does not.
3. Though it is claimed that all X's have Y as a part, they do not."

Developmental/Historical Contradictions
"You can claim that others have mistaken the origin, development, or history of your object of study.
1. Though X seems to be stable/rising/falling..., it is not.
2. Though X may seem to have originate/evolve in Y, it did not.
3. Though the sequence of development of X seems to be 1, 2, and 3, it is not.
4. Though X seems to be part of a larger historical development, it is not."

External Cause-Effect Contradiction
"You can claim that assumed causal relationships do not exist (or vice versa).
1. Though X seems to cause Y, it does not.
2. Though X seems to cause Y, both X and Y are caused by Z."

Contradictions of Perspective
"These contradictions run deeper. Most contradictions do not change the terms of the discussion. In perspectival contradictions, the author suggests that everyone must look at things in a new way.
1. X has been discussed in Y context, but a new context of understanding reveals new truth about ... (The new context can be social, political, philosophical, historical, economic, academic, ethical, gender specific, etc.)
2. X has been used to explain Y, but a new theory makes us see it differently.
3. X has been analyzed using theory/value system Y, leading to a rejection of X as inapplicable to Y. But now we see that Y is relevant to X in a new way."