

THE FUNNEL APPROACH TO WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

Your literature review should start broad, become more specific, and end exactly where your study begins.

This handout includes a template to guide you in developing your own literature review, a set of questions to help you construct each section of a funnel-style review, an example showing how these tools can be applied, and an exercise that allows students to check their understanding of the funnel approach to writing a literature review.

1.0 Literature review template

Paragraph 1: Broad context

- Introduce the general field
- Explain why it matters

Exemplar starting sentence:

The hospitality industry plays a critical role in economic development and customer experience management...

Paragraph 2–3: Narrow to topic area

- Focus on a key issue within the field

Exemplar starting sentence:

Within this industry, customer satisfaction has become a central concern for managers...

Paragraph 4–5: Define key variables

- Define each variable using literature

Exemplar starting sentence:

Service quality has been widely defined as...

Customer satisfaction refers to...

Paragraph 6: Theoretical foundation - UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS NEED NOT FOCUS ON THIS DEPENDING ON THEIR RQ AND GUIDANCE FROM THE SUPERVISOR

- Introduce relevant theory

Exemplar starting sentence:

The SERVQUAL model explains service quality through five dimensions...

Paragraph 7–8: Empirical studies

- Compare findings from past research

Exemplar starting sentence:

- Previous studies have shown mixed results...
- While some researchers found..., others reported...

Paragraph 9: Research gap

- Show what is missing

Exemplar starting sentence:

- Despite these studies, limited research has focused on...
- Additionally, few studies have examined...

Paragraph 10: Link to your study

- Conclude and justify your research

Exemplar starting sentence:

Therefore, this study seeks to examine...

2.0 THE FUNNEL AS QUESTIONS

LEVEL 1: Broad context

- What is the general field of my study?
- Why is this field important globally or locally?

LEVEL 2: Narrow topic

- What specific issue within this field am I focusing on?
- Why is it important?

LEVEL 3: Key variables

- What are my main variables?
- How have scholars defined them?
- How are they measured?

LEVEL 4: Theory

- What theory explains the relationship between my variables?
- How does it apply to my study?

LEVEL 5: Empirical evidence

- What have previous studies found?
- Are findings consistent or conflicting?
- Where were these studies conducted?

LEVEL 6: Research gap

- What is missing in the literature?
- What has not been studied (context, method, population)?
- Why is my study needed?

3.0 AN EXAMPLE

Topic:

Service quality → Customer satisfaction in hospitality

Funnel in practice:

Broad:

The hospitality industry is highly competitive and customer-focused...

Narrow:

Customer satisfaction is a key determinant of business success...

Variables:

Service quality is defined as...

Customer satisfaction refers to...

Theory:

The SERVQUAL model explains...

Empirical:

Some studies find strong relationships... others do not...

Gap:

However, limited studies have examined this relationship in small boutique hotels in developing economies...

Your study:

This study therefore investigates...

4.0 EXERCISE

“The effect of event experience on attendee satisfaction”

Write ONE sentence for each funnel level:

- Broad context
- Narrow topic
- Variables
- Theory
- Empirical finding
- Gap