What is a literature review?

Developing Academic Writing

A good literature review is *not*

- a list of everything written on your topic

- a review of what you happened to read

- a simple summary of related work

- personal or otherwise unfair critique

Two arguments

- An explicit argument
  - Past research has (partially) answered this question
  - ...but some things are still unknown.

- An implicit argument
  - My research makes a worthwhile contribution to the field.

"Implicit argument"とは

- Implicit: understood, but not directly expressed

A. Should we eat lunch at this restaurant?

B. My friend said the food here is only so-so.

P1: We should eat at a restaurant with good food.

P2: This restaurant does not have good food.

Conclusion: We should not eat at this restaurant.

Literature review as implicit argument

- Explicit argument (simplified):

- `Research papers A, B, and C found ✿✿.`
- `Research papers D and E found 💣💣.`
- `It is not known 👀.`
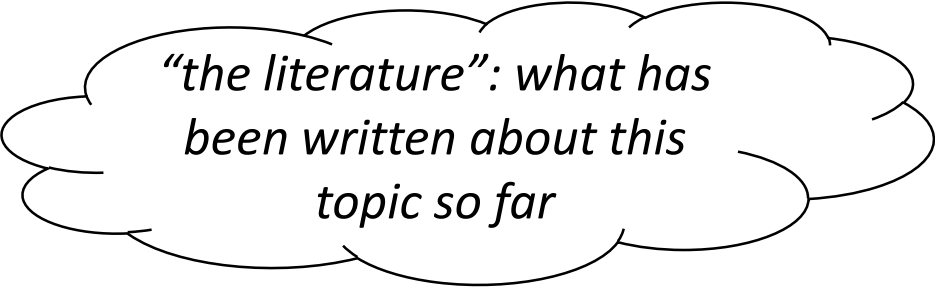
Implicit argument:

P1. Past research relates to 👀👀; hasn't solved it.
P2. My research can help solve 👀👀.

C: My research makes a contribution to the field.

A good literature review *is*

- a systematic overview of research related to your topic

- a selection of the most relevant past work

- a synthesis of connections within that work

"the literature": what has been written about this topic so far

- a critical evaluation of the literature°
  - What approaches have been used to study in the past?
  - What are the strengths of particular studies or approaches?
  - What are their weaknesses?

How do I get started?

- What is *your* thesis statement, objective, or research question?
- What published work relates to your thesis?
  - Library searches
  - Work with your supervisor & colleagues
  - Tracing back citations

"Goldilocks" principle
- Wide enough: include all relevant
- Not too wide: connect to your ideas

Audience & Purpose

- Who will read the review? *Why?* What should you show them?

- Professors
  - *Check that you understand the field*
  - "Demonstrate familiarity, expertise, and intelligence"
    (Academic Coaching & Writing 2013)

- Other researchers, including other graduate students
  - *Learn about the question, past answers*
  - Show what is known & what questions remain.

Organize the literature review

- Chronologically
  - History of the research over time
  - What were the original questions? How were they answered?
  - Major trends and how they lead to the present

- Thematically
  - Group the literature by themes or concepts
  - Show connections within the literature
  - Often considered stronger – but only if you can show clear themes

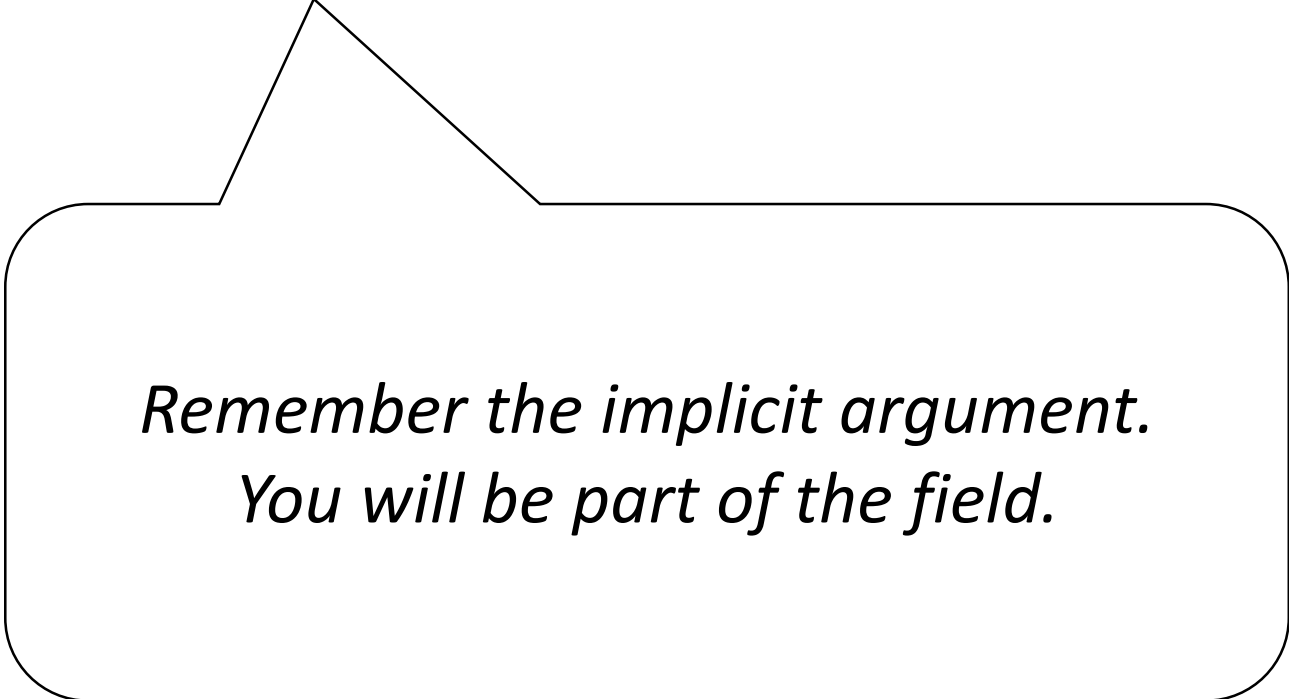# Critically evaluate the literature

- "Ask yourself questions like these" (Taylor n.d.)

  - Has the author formulated a problem/issue?

  - Is it clearly defined? Is its significance clearly established?

  - Could it have been approached more effectively from another perspective?

  - How good are the basic components of the study? (data, methods, analysis…)

  - Can you "deconstruct" the argument's logic? Are there any logic problems?

  - How does this relate to the thesis or question you are developing?

Don't just list & describe

"A literature review is a piece of **discursive prose**, not a list describing or summarizing one piece of literature after another. [...] Instead, organize the literature review into sections that present themes or identify trends, including relevant theory. You are not trying to list all the material published, but to synthesize and evaluate it according to the guiding concept of your thesis or research question." (Taylor n.d.)

Don't just list & describe

- Include only the most relevant material for your argument.
- Explain that material within the context of your thesis.
- "Situate your research in a larger narrative" (ACW 2013).

Remember the implicit argument.
You will be part of the field.