

Table C.5 Common problems in literature reviews

Common problem	Characteristics	How to deal with it
Inappropriate key word search	Too specific key words give limited hits, too broad key words give abundant hits.	Try to get a sample of approximately 100 core articles that you start to read on a particular topic. Read backwards: most recent articles first. If they are published in proper scientific journals you will quickly find out that these articles will summarise most of the relevant literature written in the past; it will help you to identify important sources (which you still have to read in order to develop your own judgment).
You miss out on important authors	Some important authors have used other concepts for the topic you are searching for.	If the author is really important, he or she will probably be referred to in one of your key articles. Get the reference indirectly through the snowball method; then add the key words of this author (or synonyms) to your search and do it again.
Discipline or topic not well covered in the literature	The research topic is not yet well covered which gives low number of hits in the (top) literature.	Chose journals that are relevant for your research topic, but do not necessarily belong to the 'top journals'; search for the last ten years on a broad number of key words.
Not enough time taken for (collectively) reading the relevant literature	Only looking in the 'abstract', 'key words' or 'titles' of articles to save time. Use of a division of labour in a research team.	This is a structural problem, which does not have an easy fix. You should in any case downplay the pretensions of the literature search if there is not enough time. In case of labour divisions: make sure that you read the key articles collectively. There is no alternative for researchers but to read all relevant literature; a solution is to start with the most quoted sources and to proceed with less popular articles. The latter, however, are not necessarily less relevant to your research project.