Outline

- the function
- the approach
- the content
- the structure
- questions the literature review should answer
Function

- It provides the context for research.
- It acknowledges the work of others.
- It familiarises you with the disciplinary ‘conversation’.
Function

- It informs and modifies your own research.
- It identifies an appropriate research question.
- It finds evidence to establish the need for the proposed research.
Function

- It establishes your thesis in the chain of research in your field.
- It shows an examiner you are familiar with important research in your area.
- It demonstrates to an examiner your critical understanding of theory.
Approach

The literature review should be

*Concept*-centric

and not.....

*Author*-centric

Should build the picture of your field ...
Approach

The literature review is organised in terms of conceptual themes.

Your research question or hypothesis sets the parameters of your field within the broader field of your discipline.
Content

The literature review contains summaries and critical analyses of reported research relating to aspects of your research question or proposition and the methods available to address the question.
Ensure that every text you include in your literature review does one or more of the following:

- deals with theory that underpins the thesis;
- makes a definitive statements about an aspect of your study;
- deals with your subject area or overlaps it;
- shows your acknowledgement of the work of others in the research field.
Ensure that every text you include in your literature review does one or more of the following:

- shows your acknowledgement of the work of others in the research field;
- assists in building up a coherent argument;
- puts your work into an external context;
- defines the current state of research in your area.

Use the ‘So what?’ test for every reference!
Structure

Lit. review presents a coherent argument, leaving the reader in no doubt that the research is necessary and valuable.

Presents a well-judged selection of material; it is not necessary to include everything you have read on the topic - only those relevant to your research question.
Evaluative perspective

- Avoids merely presenting a description of the literature and previous work on the topic.

- Comments on the value of the literature summarised in the review.

- Clearly presents your argument and perspective in relation to the literature reviewed.

- Correctly interprets the findings of the reviewed literature.
Structure

- Organised into sections, sub-sections, with a summary at the end of each major section to emphasise points being made.

- Connects the literature reviewed to the research question and your methods of research.
Structure

- The introductory paragraph sets boundaries of the literature review and provides an overview of the whole literature review.

- Organised into areas and themes, with summaries and critical analyses of both supporting and critical literature.

(Avoid author-centric organisation!)
Questions the Literature Review should answer:

- What do we already know in the research area?
- What are the characteristics of the key concepts/factors/variables?
- What are the relationships between the key concepts/factors/variables?
Questions the Literature Review should answer:

- Why pursue the research question?
- What are the existing theories?
- Where are the gaps and inconsistencies in our knowledge and understanding?
- What views need to be further tested?
Questions the Literature Review should answer:

- What evidence is lacking/inconclusive/contradictory/too limited?
- What current research designs or methods or seem unsatisfactory?
- What contribution to the area can my research be expected to make?