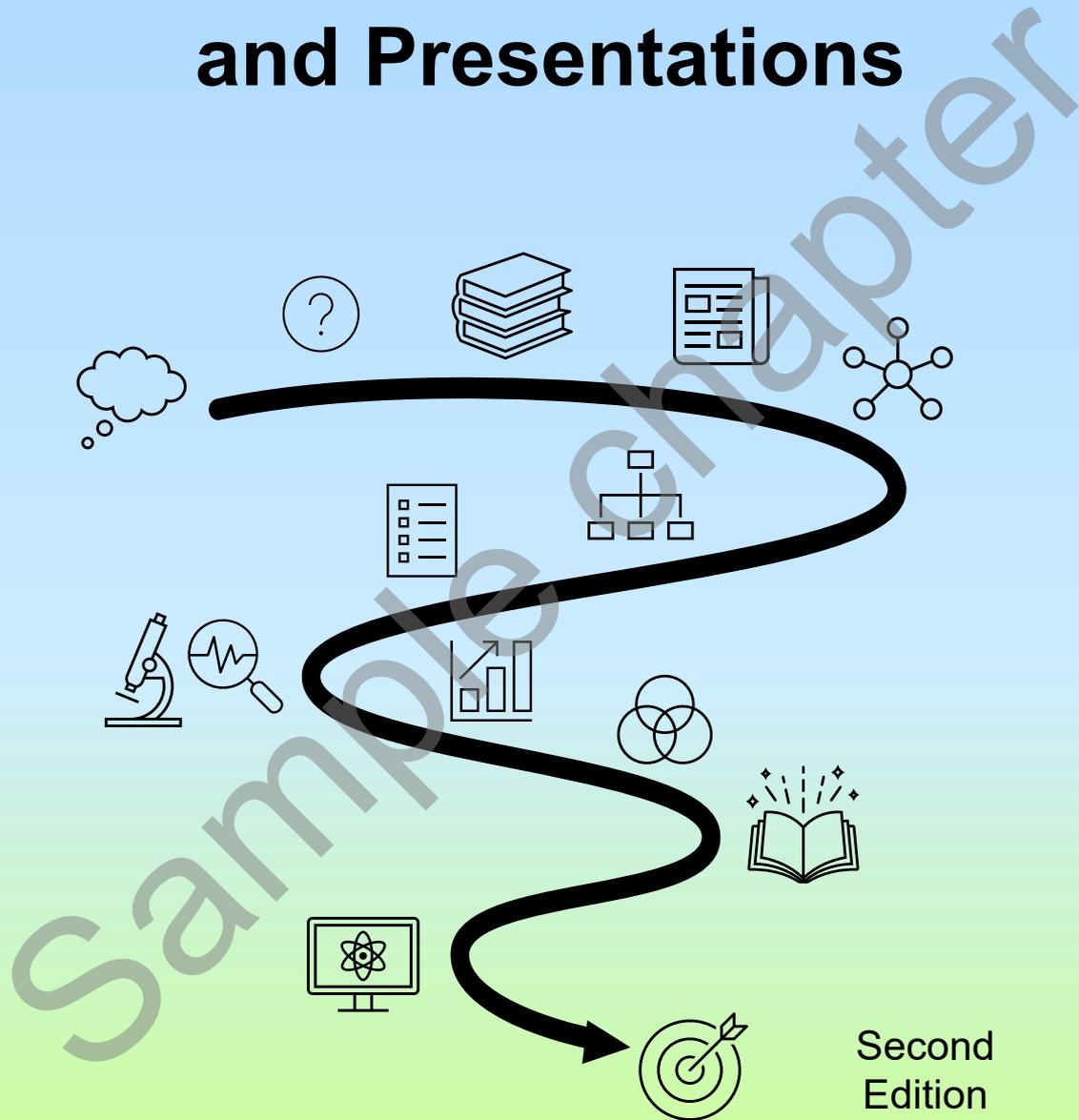


# COMPASS GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS: From Research Questions to Research Reports and Presentations



**Dr Sandra Mandic, PhD, PMP**  
AGILE Research Ltd.



**Compass Guide  
Research Training**  
By AGILE Research Ltd.

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*To my children, Adriana and Oliver McKague,  
for their love, inspiration, sense of adventure and zest for learning  
which bring joy and happiness to our lives.*

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## How to Write a Background or Literature Review

A background section or literature review provides the context for your research. This section of a research report:

- summarises what is already known about a particular topic,
- identifies missing information or knowledge gaps, and
- provides rationale or justification for your planned research.

The process of writing a background section or literature review will help you develop and refine your research question or objective.

Start this section with a brief introduction that provides the big-picture context for your research and outlines the importance and relevance of your planned project.

Organise your literature review using key themes and subthemes to summarise the current knowledge related to your research topic in a logical order.

YouTube  
video link

### How to Write a Literature Review

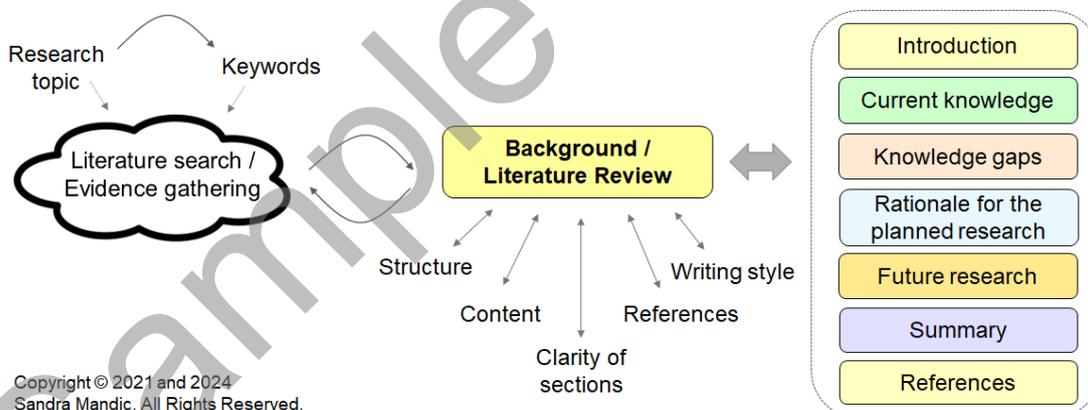


The AGILE Research YouTube Channel  
[www.youtube.com/@agileresearch](http://www.youtube.com/@agileresearch)

Provide a critical analysis of the existing literature / evidence by analysing strengths and limitations of previous research or existing evidence and identify knowledge gaps. Your background section or literature review should provide a strong rationale for your planned project.

End your literature review or a background section with a summary of existing knowledge and knowledge gaps, implications and recommendations for future research.

Cite relevant references in text and include a reference list at the end of your research report.



Look up some examples of well-written literature reviews and study them

Develop a good structure for your background section or literature review

Organise your background section or literature review in a logical sequence

Use subheadings and write clearly

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## Guidelines for Writing a Background Section / Literature Review

### Structure



- Present topics in a logical sequence
- Use subheadings effectively
- State the purpose of the literature review in the introduction section\*
- Summarise existing knowledge and knowledge gaps in the summary section
- State the implications of findings and areas for future research in the summary\*

### Content



- Conduct literature searches using keywords relevant to your research topic
- Ensure that content of your literature review is high quality
- Cover key themes relevant to your research topic
- Cite evidence / articles that are relevant to the literature review topic
- Describe together research or evidence that addresses similar topics
- Provide critical evaluation of strengths and limitations of cited articles\*

### Clarity of sections



- Start each section with an introductory statement
- End each section with a summary of findings, limitations of previous research and identified knowledge gaps
- Describe highly relevant articles in several sentences stating purpose, study sample, key findings, strengths and limitations, and implications of findings\*

### References



- Ensure thorough referencing of most important relevant evidence sources\*
- Reference scientific literature (high quality studies from credible sources)\*
- Reference the original source
- When referring to evidence from various sources, include references after the first sentence that mentions a particular research or report\*
- Use correct format of in-text referencing (discipline or institution-specific)
- In academic reports, use academic conventions for reporting references\*

### Writing style



- Present ideas clearly to ensure that your literature review is easy to read
- Use a writing style that complies with writing standards of your discipline\*
- Spell out all abbreviations the first time they are used
- Limit use of abbreviations throughout the literature review
- Spell out numbers when they are the first word in a sentence
- Proof-read your literature review

\*Particularly relevant for academic research.

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Keep writing as you are searching and reading the literature

Your background section or literature review will evolve from one draft to another

Use all feedback that you receive to improve your subsequent drafts

Writing a background section or a literature review takes time. Plan accordingly!

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