

# **Structuring a Literature Review:**

The Role of the Review in Argumentation

# Your Problem Statement is Your Friend

- Establishes the terms that are central;
  - Delimits scope of the literature review, provides direction
- Provides the context/frame for the research question
- Defines the project
  - Descriptive, Exploratory, Explanatory

# A Linear Model

- Block #1: Summarize existing work
- Block #2: Critically evaluate previous work
  - Develop new dimension(s) for assessment (Geertz's concept of "refiguration")
- Block #3: General summary and specific critiques

Upside: clear, easy to do and easy to follow;

Downside: complicate issues require multiple lines and then you need to connect the lines

# The “Definitional” Approach

- Review *and* analysis of dominant definitions
  - *Lay, scholarly*
    - Refute or deny these using logic (inconsistencies, paradoxes, incompleteness)
- Offer alternative definition/framework
- Critique existing literature in light of new frame

*Upside:* You are in charge of the “story” the literature tells and you only need it in order to be the “only one standing” when you are done;

*Downside:* Aren't you special.....

# A “Story” or “Historical” Approach

- Begin with the foundational theorists (strengths)
  - Often the most cited
  - Describe the critique that others made (Round 2)
- Discuss the foundation of Round #2 (strengths)
  - Discuss the limitations that were seen and by whom (Round #3)
- Conclude/Summarize the constraints on knowledge/understanding
- Upside: Has narrative (cliffhanger) feel to it; thorough; respectful; educational;
- Downside: Can sound like a book report (“canned”) depending on the topic); also you can lose your own thread

# Poststructural Literature Review

- Begin from a “standpoint” (opinions/context) and often based on experience
- Inevitably incomplete (picks up threads)
  - Reliance on rhetorical completeness
- Norms are key (other than “scientific” norms)
- Personal relation with the reader