

Hints for Writing a Specific Background section

Hint: Describe a process; do not make a list.

Another common mistake that some authors make is that they just make a list of findings without saying how the findings relate to each other. A Lit Review will usually focus on a process and on the specific effects of some factors on that process. The reader needs to know *which factors or characteristics* cause the effects, which *parts* of the process change, *in which situations* these changes happen, who is affected, etc.

In the problematic example below, the authors just make a list of research findings, one study at a time. The description would have been better if they made one paragraph for the differences between male and female speech, one for different kinds of people (ex: females, males, aggressive males), and another paragraph for *what* the females are talking about.

In the better example below, the authors describe the effects of auditory distractions (the factor or independent variable) on comprehension (the process). These authors mention the different kinds of auditory distractions that researchers have seen affect the process, they talk about how distractions affect comprehension (by requiring additional processing), and they talk about the kinds of participants that researchers saw affected by this interference.

Problematic Lit Review style

Patricia Hayes Bradley (1981) research suggest that female were more accepted when speech were clear and to the point. In regards to male speech, female were not well accepted regardless if female know what they are talking about or not. Bradley (1981) suggest that even if a female is intellect in speech, female would still be look down upon due to status in society.

Danielle Popp et al (2003) suggest that speech differences were more essential in race than in gender. Both black male and female speech are direct and speech is strain with feelings and is not fit for social environment compare to that of Whites. Female speech has more emotional input and is not as straight forward as that of male speech.

Neil M. Malamuth and Lisa M. Brown (1994) study the effects of aggressive male towards female speech. Malamuth and Brown (1994) findings suggest that aggressive male view on female speech is that of not being able to differentiate between kindness and seductiveness and between assertiveness and hostility; therefore female speech are less likely to be accounted for.

Cheris Kramer (1974) explains many different researches on sex differences in speech. Kramer (1974) explain that female speech are less extravagant than males. Compare to that of male, female speech are often shorter in length and word choice are not as elaborate like those of males. Female tend to show different in pitch presentation when speaking in different type of situations.

<<Can you see that this version is *listing* the studies rather than trying to tell what happens when in the process? The reader keeps asking: How are these studies related to each other?

<Also, it is using author outside citation style.

<It is even using authors' first names, which is journalistic, not scientific, style.

Better Lit Review style

Can you see that >> this version is explaining *how* auditory distractions affect comprehension? It mentions different kinds of distractors and what happens when they affect comprehension.

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Note the effective use of author-inside citation style

Auditory distractions can affect comprehension even if the sounds are ignored or unrelated to the cognitive task at hand (Campbell, 2005). Irrelevant sounds such as auditory distractions, impact comprehension abilities in different ways. Irrelevant sounds often disrupt selective attention and impair cognitive performance (Banbury, Macken, Tremblay, & Jones, 2001). Auditory distractions that occur in one's natural environment also require processing (Schroger, Giard, & Wolff, 2000). This additional processing is in addition to the four complex processes already required for reading comprehension. Reading comprehension levels decrease when irrelevant sounds are present during serial short-term memory tasks (Jones, 1999). Auditory distractions affect different populations and different cognitive tasks (Beaman, 2005). These include reading and writing of children, adolescents, and adults; and students and employees of all ages. Elementary school children, for example, when exposed to auditory distractions showed poor comprehension on challenging tasks (Evans, Hygge, & Bullinger, 1995).

Hint: Tell your reader about *which specific effects the researchers found*; not just that they found “significant effects”. The important information is *what was going on* when the researchers found significant effects. Again, the reader needs to know *which characteristics* cause effects, which *parts* of the process change, *in which situations* these changes happen, who is affected, etc.

Before “surgery”	After
Background noise has a significant effect on cognitive performance (Furham & Strbac, 2002). [...] Background noise has significant effects on reading comprehension (Furham & Strbac, 2002).	Cognitive performance in general, and reading comprehension in particular, decreases when noise is present (Furham & Strbac, 2002).
Both kinds of irrelevant sounds had a significant effect on cognitive performance.	Both kinds of irrelevant sounds led to a significant decrease in cognitive performance.