The Literature Review Process

Laying the foundations of your dissertation

John Haynes
Why bother? Who cares?

• It’s a requirement

• To situate your own analysis

• To avoid major embarrassment
How to go about it?

• See *Like Cattle and Horses* introduction
• Reading *around* your topic
  – Questions generate questions
  – Smith and nationalism, identity, historiography
• Situating analysis
• Identifying questions or gaps
• Refining your approach
Like Cattle and Horses

• Grasps major arguments
• Evaluates strengths and weaknesses
  – Usefulness and limitations
  – Sensitivity to chosen context
• Identifies gap to be filled
• Refines own approach
  – Builds on strengths
  – Avoids mistakes of (eg) oversimplification, excessive emphasis on inappropriate factors...
Detour: the *critical* approach

• Identify and summarise the BIG argument
• What is it based on?
  – Types of evidence
  – Types of approach
• Evaluation: usefulness and limitations
• Awareness of alternatives
  – Other evidence?
  – Other approaches?
...but what can I do?

• Reading around the topic
• Construct annotated bibliography
• Group your authors: perspective/approach
• Situate yourself
  – Account for perspectives critically
  – Account for yourself
• Talk to your supervisor
• And good luck!