

## Literature Reviews

### What is a literature review?

Literature reviews:

- discuss published information in a specific subject area
- describe, summarize, evaluate, clarify, interpret, and synthesize the information, arguments, and ideas of others in a specific subject area without adding new knowledge
- identify different perspectives and work done in a subject area
- place a project in the context of existing work in the field
- are often included in proposals, academic research papers/articles, theses, and dissertations
- might trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates

### Why should you write a literature review?

Write a literature review to

- provide an overview of a topic
- identify trends and patterns in a field
- identify important works and authors in a field
- identify gaps in existing research
- provide justification for research projects
- provide a conceptual framework for a research project

### How do I start?

1. Define your topic, but be aware that you may redefine and revise your topic and research question as you learn more about your topic.
2. Gather information
  - Learn about reference materials in your field (encyclopedias, bibliographies, journals, etc.).
  - Search specialized databases or the Internet for relevant information.
3. Evaluate your information—think “recent, reliable, relevant.”
  - Determine if your sources are current. What is considered current will vary with the discipline.
  - Critically analyze the sources you find. Ask what is valid or problematic about each source.
  - Look for biases/objectivity, accuracy, specific objectives, and valid methodology.
4. Organize your information and link your sources together.
  - Compare your sources to each other. How are the arguments similar and different?
  - Identify key ideas from your sources and decide how to group them by choosing an organizational pattern (e.g., chronological, thematic, or methodological).
    - Chronological—Write about your sources in the order they were published based on year, decade, era, etc.
    - Thematic—Organize your sources around the topics or issues rather than the progression of time.
    - Methodological—Focus on the methods of the researcher or writer rather than on time or content.
  - Write a working thesis statement that clarifies the point you want to make about the research—what do you want readers to understand about the body of research you have included?
5. Begin drafting the sections.
  - an introduction that explains the context, thesis, and organizational pattern
  - a main body that summarizes and synthesizes your sources and provides enough detail to prove your points
  - a conclusion that explains what information you have drawn from reviewing the literature, any trends, any gaps, etc.
  - a reference page, bibliography, or works cited page
6. Revise over a lengthy period of time to allow for fresh insights and new content. Conduct more research, if necessary.
7. Solicit an opinion from another person who will give honest suggestions for improvement.
8. Revise for completeness and clarity.

Sources:

Campbell, Bryant J. et al. "Writing a Literature Review." 2003. *Faculty of Health Sciences, The University of Sydney*.  
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"Literature Reviews." 4 Feb. 2002. *UNC-CH Writing Center*. 25 Aug. 2005 <[http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature\\_review.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html)>.

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