

## Writing a literature review

### What is a literature review?

A literature review provides a comprehensive review of the literature in a specific area of interest. It enables you to:

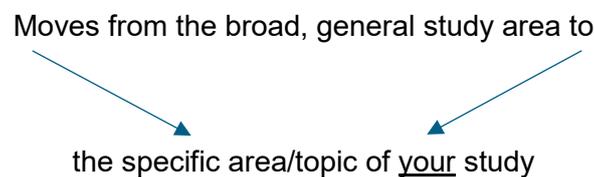
- investigate previous research and find out what's been done before
- consider theoretical frameworks
- identify 'gaps' in existing knowledge to find out how your study fits within current knowledge and understanding
- determine/clarify/justify your research question/problem
- select the most appropriate methodology (if applicable).

Importantly, a literature review sets the context for your study and provides the framework for interpreting your findings and results. Like an essay, it should have an introduction, body and a conclusion.

### How to write the literature review

Preparing a literature review typically involves critically evaluating each piece of literature before writing your review. You then put together the ideas (critically discuss the ideas, do not just list them) to give a cohesive overview of what you have found. Demonstrating your knowledge of the field of study is an essential part of a literature review; therefore, demonstrating breadth and depth of references is extremely important.

After you have critically read and summarised each article, think about organising the ideas so that you identify the broad subject area, give an overview of the 'big picture' to date, and then get more specific with the relevant details of what you have found in the literature, for example the views/theories about this topic area and the findings from previous studies. You do this to set the context for your particular topic/research area. This enables the reader to see how your study/topic area 'fits' into, or follows on from previous research.



### Questions to ask to help you organise your ideas

#### *In the abstract:*

- Could someone understand the literature review just from reading the abstract?
- Is this an accurate one sentence summary for each section in your literature review?

#### *In the introductory section:*

- What is the general subject area under review?
- What concepts/theories underlying the topic needs defining?
- What are the main themes/ideas/concepts/issues under investigation?
- Is there an overall view e.g. is there a general consensus or is there a variety of views?

#### *In the findings/body section:*

- Which writers write about the same ideas?
- How do these ideas fit into the bigger picture?
- What are the main themes/ideas/concepts/issues?
- How are writers' work similar/different?
- Are there areas of agreement/disagreement?
- Are there any limitations in the literature/studies?

### *In the concluding section:*

- What is my final summary of the review?
- Is there a gap in the existing knowledge?
- How does my proposed study relate to these findings (if applicable)?
- How will I conduct my investigation (if applicable)? This question will lead you into deciding how you will gather information for your study.
- Why will I use this method of investigation and not some other? This question will lead you to justify your methodology (if applicable).

### *Make sure you:*

- organise your review according to themes/ideas/concepts/issues
- structure your themes/ideas/concepts/issues with heading and sub headings
- be analytical and critical not just descriptive
- try to avoid just listing authors' ideas. Which authors agree, disagree, develop an argument further?
- write, edit and redraft to help clarify your themes/ideas/concepts/issues.

## Common literature review structure

### Title

Keep the title to a few major words. This acts to remind you of the particular focus of your literature review.

### Abstract

The abstract is a summary of the literature review. The abstract provides a summary sentence from each section. Complete the abstract after the literature review is written.

### Introduction

Include the purpose of the literature review, and a logical sequence of the development of your sections i.e. the **themes/ideas/concepts/issues** in order. You may include background and short definitions, scope or limitations. Use the marking rubric/criteria to check that you are covering all that is required in the task.

### Findings

Divide the findings into specific areas under investigation or the major sections of your literature review. It may be **themes/ideas/concepts/issues**. Use **headings and subheadings to logically structure** your response and **synthesise an overview** of your topic in a reasoned and integrated argument. You should be able to identify major points that you want to convey to the reader. Make sure your paragraphs are in a logical order. Use paragraph structure (topic sentence, referenced evidence from the literature to support and evaluate your argument and concluding or linking sentences) to **critically analyse and evaluate or make judgments** about the literature. The structure will vary depending on the topic and the instructions. In some literature reviews you may present some aspects chronologically. For others, you may present background information with definitions and then analyse two or three case studies in detail. Then you may draw conclusions using the case studies as evidence for the argument that you are presenting to the reader. Always keep the focus of the review in mind, follow the task details and the marking rubric provided.

### Conclusion

Summary of the major points made, to provide an overview of the literature. Recommendations can be included in a separate section.

### Reference List

All material referred to in the literature review **must** be listed in alphabetical order on a separate page using the referencing style prescribed by the Unit Assessor or school.

**NOTE:** The references list should **only** contain works that are cited in the literature review.