

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:

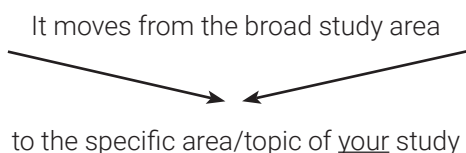
- investigate previous research and find out what's been done before
- consider theoretical frameworks
- identify 'gaps' in existing knowledge to find out if your study is worth doing
- determine/clarify/justify your research question/problem
- select the most appropriate methodology (if applicable).

Importantly, a literature review sets the context for your study and provides the framework for interpreting your 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 (discuss the ideas don't 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, referencing 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 introductory section:

- What is the subject area under review?
- Is there a concept underlying this subject that needs defining?
- What are the main concerns/areas of investigation?
- Is there an overall view e.g. is there a general consensus or is there a variety of views?

In the body section:

- Which writers write about the same ideas?
- How do these ideas fit into the bigger picture?
- How is the writer's work similar/different?
- Are there any areas of agreement/disagreement?
- Are there any limitations in the literature/studies?

Academic Skills Quick Guide

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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 ideas/concepts/issues
- try to be analytical and critical
- write drafts to help clarify your ideas
- try to avoid just listing authors' ideas. Listing the ideas makes the writing descriptive rather than analytical.

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