WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a literature review?
A literature review is a critical examination of information relevant to your proposed research.

It involves analysing and evaluating the work of a range of scholars in relation to your research topic.

Reviewing the literature will help you identify your research question.

What to consider when reading

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<th>Question</th>
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<td>How is this paper relevant to my research topic?</td>
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<td>How does this paper contribute to the field?</td>
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<td>What is the main argument of this paper?</td>
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<td>How strong is the evidence?</td>
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<td>How are the views expressed similar or different from other papers I have read?</td>
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<td>Can the theoretical approaches/methods be applied to my research?</td>
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<td>Who/What has not been considered? Does it matter?</td>
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<td>Are the claims supported by research or anecdotal evidence?</td>
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<td>What are the 'landmark' papers in my research area? What are the 'great debates' about?</td>
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<td>What topics have been overlooked until now?</td>
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Did you know?
Not all theses/dissertations contain a literature review chapter. Sometimes the literature for each topic is reviewed at the beginning of the relevant chapter.

Tip
Engaged and active note taking and note making are essential to the literature review process.

A literature review includes paraphrases, quotes and your critique of authors whose works you have read.


Did you know?
Searching for and reviewing the literature will continue throughout the thesis writing process.

EndNote is bibliographic software available free to all UWA students. [http://libguides.library.uwa.edu.au/endnote](http://libguides.library.uwa.edu.au/endnote)
What do I include?
If you are reviewing literature for a thesis or a dissertation, remember to do so in relation to your research question.

- Place your research in an historical/theoretical context.
- Show how your research relates to previous studies and why it is important.
- Examine ‘landmark’ i.e. momentous or key papers in your field.
- Identify and critically discuss key theoretical or methodological controversies.
- Compare and contrast different authors’ views on your research topic.
- Identify what areas still need to be researched (the gaps in knowledge).
- Establish the need for your research.
- Ensure your voice is clearly evident in your critiques and throughout the review.

A brief guide to organising your information
(may vary according to discipline)
- **Introduction:** Situate your research in the context of previous work. Provide brief background information. Include your hypothesis/research question towards the end of the introduction.
- **Body:** Organise information into sections and critique ideas you have read about in relation to your research question. Summarize clusters of studies. Show how your research will fill a gap and/or extend knowledge. Reference the ideas of others.
- **Conclusion:** Summarise major contributions of significant studies and major flaws and gaps. State how your research will contribute to or extend knowledge in your discipline area.

Keeping on track
If you lose focus when writing your review, the following prompts may help you get back on track. Try completing the following:

- The main schools of thought/theoretical perspectives in my area are …
- The ‘great debates’ in my area are…
- The key researchers in my area are…
- What remains unclear is…
- The gaps I see are…
- I propose to…

A good literature review
- identifies your research topic
- leads to the formulation of an hypothesis or research question
- summarises other scholars’ work
- evaluates the relevance of other scholars’ work in relation to your research topic
- discusses limitations in conceptual frameworks/methods
- identifies clearly the area you will address
- has well-structured paragraphs
- has clear transitions between ideas
- references and substantiates all claims
- has up-to-date and accurate citations
- has consistent formatting, accurate spelling, and correct grammar.

Remember:
The reference librarians can help you become familiar with useful and relevant
- databases
- digital archives
- citation indexes

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