

WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

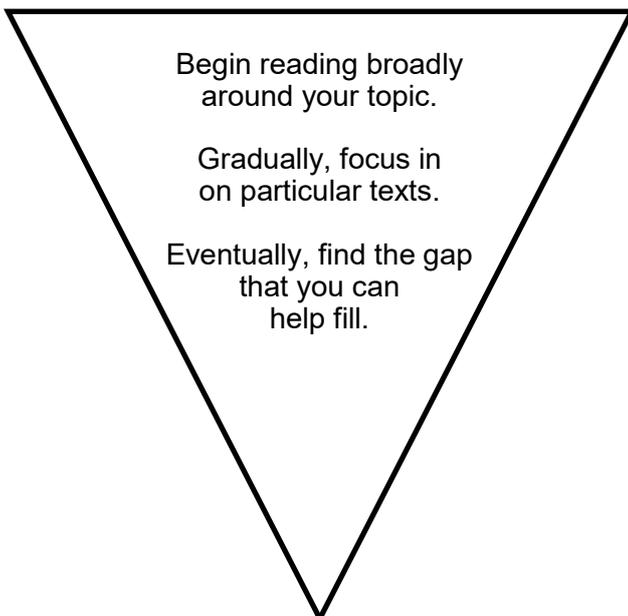
What is a literature review?

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

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

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

Reviewing the literature will help you identify your research question and the gap in your field that you can explore.



TIP

Searching and reviewing literature will be an ongoing process throughout your research. However, the majority should be done at the start so you know what has already been covered in your field. Not everything you read will necessarily be included in your literature review.

How to start a literature review?

- Identify themes and key areas. Use these as your subheadings in the literature review and as a way to code your note taking.
- When taking notes, reference as you go and create an annotated bibliography. This means you summarise the key ideas, type out any quotes and paraphrase where you can.
- Colour code these notes based on themes, to help you cut and paste them into the literature review.

TIP

Endnote is a free software available to all UWA students. You should use this to keep track of your references and basic notes.
<http://libguides.library.uwa.edu.au/endnote>

What you should consider when reading a paper/book:

- How is this relevant to your research?
- How does it contribute to your field?
- What is the main argument?
- How reliable is this source?
- How strong is the evidence provided?
- How are the views expressed similar or different to other scholars?
- Can the theoretical approaches/methods be applied to your research?
- What has not been considered?
- Who are the key scholars in your field?
- What topics have been overlooked?

TIP

You do not have to read every word of a book. Find relevant chapters and try to build the skill of skim reading.

What should you be trying to achieve?

Your literature review should:

- place your research in a 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 the areas that still need to be researched (the gaps in knowledge),
- establish the need for your research, and
- ensure your voice is clearly evident in your critiques and throughout the review.

TIP

Read literature reviews in your discipline to analyse the structure and style. You may even find some interesting citations to search for.

A good literature review:

- has well-structured paragraphs,
- has clear transitions between ideas,
- references and substantiates all claims,
- has up-to-date citations, and
- has consistent formatting, accurate spelling, and correct grammar.

How should you structure a literature review?

Always check what is suitable for your field, however here is a rough outline:

- **Introduction** — Situate your research in the context of previous work. Provide brief background information. Include your thesis statement/hypothesis.
- **Body** — Organise information into sections and critique ideas you have read about in relation to your research question. Summarise 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.

In some theses/dissertations a literature review could be broken into a few chapters. Always discuss a structure with your supervisor before writing.

TIP

Each paragraph of your literature review should be making a new point and relate back to your thesis statement/hypothesis and the gap you have identified.

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