



Writing
Literature
Reviews

What is a Literature Review?

- The literature review is a critical exploration of the existing research that is relevant to your dissertation topic.

<http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/lit-review/>

Purpose of the Literature Review

- To provide background information about a research topic.
- To establish the importance of a topic.
- To demonstrate familiarity with a topic/problem.
- To set the stage for further work and allow you to join a scholarly conversation.

Elements of an Effective Literature Review

An effective literature review should :

- Be organized around and directly related to the thesis or research question you are developing.
- Synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known.
- Identify areas of controversy in the literature.
- Formulate questions that need further research.

Writing the Introduction

In the introduction, you should:

- Define:
 - the general topic, issue or area of concern.
- Identify:
 - trends in what has been published about the topic;
 - conflicts in theory, methodology, evidence, and conclusions;
 - gaps in research and scholarship;
 - a single problem or new perspective of immediate interest.
- Establish:
 - the writer's reason for reviewing the literature (point of view);
 - the criteria to be used in analyzing and comparing literature and the organization of the review (sequence); and
 - when necessary, state why certain literature is or is not included (scope).

Writing the Body

- Group research and other literature (reviews, theoretical articles, case studies, etc.) according to common denominators:
 - topical themes
 - qualitative v. quantitative;
 - conclusions of authors;
 - specific purpose or objective;
 - chronology, etc.
- Summarize individual studies or articles: remember that space (length) denotes significance.
- Use strong “umbrella” sentences at beginnings of paragraphs, “signposts” throughout, and brief “so what” summary sentences at intermediate points.

Writing the Conclusion

- Summarize major contributions of significant studies and articles: maintain focus established in introduction.
- Evaluate current “state of the art” for body of knowledge reviewed. Point out:
 - major methodological flaws or gaps in the research;
 - inconsistencies in theory and findings;
 - and areas or issue pertinent to future study.

Writing a Literature Review: In Summary

- As you read, try to see the “big picture”—your literature review should provide an overview of the state of research.
- Include only source materials that help you shape your argument. *Resist the temptation to include everything you’ve read!*
- Balance summary and analysis as you write.
- Keep in mind your purpose for writing:
 - How will this review benefit readers?
 - How does this review contribute to your study?
- Keep thinking about how you will **organize** everything you read in the final product.

Sources

The information for this presentation was taken from the following sources:

- <http://composition.la.psu.edu/resources/graduate-writing-center/handouts-1/Literature%20Reviews%20Fall%202010.pdf/view>
- <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review>