

Conventions of Literature Reviews

Material and Purpose

Literature reviews can serve several purposes: presenting a broad review of the existing research on your selected topic to establish the gap your work will fill, establishing your authority as a researcher based on your familiarity with the field, and preparing for your reader the necessary research for them to understand your project. A literature review often identifies patterns in a field of study and provides the historical and academic context for your research project.

As part of a larger project, like a Capstone, dissertation, or research paper, the literature review can situate your research project by identifying the questions you address, their relevance, and their relation to prior research. Please note that specific requirements will depend on your course, instructor, and field of study.

Parts of a Literature Review

Introduction. The introduction of any literature review commonly has at least three parts: (i) a definition of concepts; (ii) an explanation of the relevance of your topic; and (iii) a statement of your purpose.

- i. In discussing your research topic, explain terms and concepts that your reader will need to understand your subject, such as locations, abbreviations, and technical terms.
- ii. When explaining the relevance of your topic, consider summarizing problems, gaps, or patterns in research you have reviewed. If you wish to add some weight to your subject, explain how those issues and vacancies have implications for further research or study.
- iii. In stating your purpose, you can discuss how your project adds to prior research by identifying problems, proposing solutions, making predictions, etc. You might also describe how you have analyzed, selected, and organized the sources in your review.

Review. Consider grouping your research by theme into sections of the review. You can decide whether it makes sense to group sources according to publication date, methodology, opinion, findings, or by some other important feature. Your readers will quickly grasp the subjects of your review if it follows the outline given in your introduction. Additionally, readers will more easily understand your points if the paragraphs and sections of your review are structured by:

- iv. topic sentences with clear evidence,
- v. concise, accurate and sympathetic summaries of your sources,
- vi. description of the relationships between source material, and
- vii. final statements that connect source discussions with your overall purpose.

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Conclusion. The conclusion of your literature review can be similar to your introduction in revisiting the focus of your review by quickly summarizing and evaluating the most significant sources, methods, groups, and findings for your area of study. The most important part of your conclusion, however, is a final analysis of the research. Consider the following questions to generate concluding remarks:

- viii. What patterns emerged from your sources?
- ix. What final connections can you make for your reader?
- x. How does your literature review indicate issues, solutions, predictions, etc?

After reiterating your own contributions, you might conclude your literature review, whether independent or part of a larger project, by addressing remaining questions:

- xi. How has your review contributed to existing literature?
- xii. Where is further research necessary or possible?
- xiii. If you plan to follow your literature review with original research, how has your review shown that your research is important, necessary or relevant?

Style and Documentation

When initially searching and collecting sources and articles, stay organized by describing and documenting sources using note cards, spreadsheets, or an online assistant like *Zotero* or *RefWorks*. For additional help with drafting and documentation, you can visit the University Writing Center or our website for digital resources.

Sources Consulted

Bullock, Richard. "Reviews of Scholarly Literature" in *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*, 174-181. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

Driscoll, Dana Lynn. "Social Work Literature Review Guidelines." *The Online Writing Lab at Purdue*. July 4, 2012. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/666/01/>.

Troyka, Lynn and Douglas Hesse. *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*, 9th edition. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2009.

Turabian, Kate L. "Engaging Sources" in *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, 7th edition, 36-47. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

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