



How to Write a Literature Review

A literature review synthesizes the results of prior studies related to your topic. It places your research within a larger body of work and contributes to the reader's understanding of that work.

Share the most important or relevant research and show conceptual linkages among ideas and authors. Do not include every study you find. Give the reader enough information to be confident in your familiarity with the literature.

Introduction

- Define the topic, issue, or problem, thus providing a context for the literature review.
- Identify: trends about your topic; gaps in research; a problem or new perspective.
- State your reason (point of view) for reviewing the literature. Explain your criteria for analyzing the literature and the organization of your review (sequence). When necessary, state why certain literature is or is not included (scope).

Body

- Group research studies and other literature (reviews, theoretical articles, case studies, etc.) according to common denominators such as qualitative versus quantitative approaches, conclusions of authors, specific purpose or objective, chronology, etc.
- Use headings to signal the main topic of sections.
- Do not simply summarize the literature. Give enough information to identify a study's questions and approach. Synthesize research with a focus on key findings or conclusions.
- Use transition sentences at beginnings of paragraphs and "so what" summary sentences at intermediate points to help the reader understand comparisons and analyses. At the end of each section, tell readers what key concept, finding, definition, or theme is most critical for their reading of your study.
- Use your own words and quote sparingly. Only quote if the author said something unique or precise (e.g., a definition) that demands repeating in its exact form.
- Avoid jargon. Write in clear and active prose.

Conclusion

- Summarize major contributions of studies and articles to the body of knowledge under review.
- Evaluate the body of knowledge (e.g., identify methodological flaws or gaps in research, inconsistencies in theory and findings, and areas or issues for future study).
- Offer insight into the relationship between the central topic of the literature review and a larger area of study such as a discipline, a scientific endeavor, or a profession.

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The Writing Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Retrieved from <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html>