



How to:

Literature Review

Important notice



At the end of this presentation there is a link to a Google Forms quiz. It is recommended that you score 80% or higher.

Please take your time viewing and studying this material before you proceed with the quiz.

Objectives

After studying this module, students will:

- Learn the role and purpose of literature reviews in research.
- Understand how to develop a small scale literature review.
- Distinguish the different types of sources.
- Familiarize themselves with the steps to develop a literature review.
- Know the main points needed to make a successful literature review.

What is a Literature Review?

A literature review is a search and evaluation of the available literature in your given subject or chosen topic area. It documents the state of the art with respect to the subject or topic you are writing about.

A literature review has four main objectives:

- It **surveys** the literature in your chosen area of study.
- It **synthesizes** the information in that literature into a summary.
- It **critically analyzes** the information gathered by identifying gaps in current knowledge; by showing limitations of theories and points of view; and by formulating areas for further research and reviewing areas of controversy.
- It **presents** the literature in an organized way.

What is a Literature Review?

A literature review shows your reader that you have an in-depth grasp of your subject; and you understand where your own research fits into and adds to an existing body of agreed knowledge.

Another way of describing the previous four main tasks for the literature review are:

- demonstrates a familiarity with a body of knowledge and establishes the credibility of your work;
- summarizes prior research and says how your project is linked to it;
- integrates and summarizes what is known about a subject;
- demonstrates that you have learnt from others and that your research is a starting point for new ideas.

Why Write a Literature Review?

Literature reviews provide you with a handy guide to a particular topic. If you have limited time to conduct research, literature reviews can give you an overview or act as a stepping stone. For professionals, they are useful reports that keep them up to date with what is current in the field. For scholars, the depth and breadth of the literature review emphasizes the credibility of the writer in their field. Literature reviews also provide a solid background for a research paper's investigation. Comprehensive knowledge of the literature of the field is essential to most research papers.

Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to:

- Place each work in the context of its contribution to understanding the research problem being studied.
- Describe the relationship of each work to the others under consideration.
- Identify new ways to interpret prior research.
- Reveal any gaps that exist in the literature.
- Resolve conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous studies.
- Identify areas of prior scholarship to prevent duplication of effort.
- Point the way in fulfilling a need for additional research.
- Locate your own research within the context of existing literature (very important).

Differences Between Formal Literature Review and Research Literature Review

It is important to differentiate between the **formal literature review** and a **research literature review**.

While both of these have the similar approaches, the goals are not the same.

Formal Literature Review

- These reviews are **made for academic journals** with the purpose to serve as references for other peers in the academia.
- It should provide a **context of the topic** if the original sources do not elaborate on it.
- The language should be completely or mostly **unbiased** to assure the reader fully comprehends the original work.
- It is written to be published.

Research Literature Review

- The review will serve as reference for other peers, but to specify **HOW** it relates to your research and field.
- **Context is limited** to what is needed to understand your research questions and objectives.
- Your **advisor** and **immediate peers** in the field will most likely be the only readers to your review. For that reason, the content should consider what this specific group will need to understand it..

Steps to Developing a Literature Review:

Step 1: Search for Relevant Material

Before you begin searching for literature, you need an **established narrow topic**. If the purpose of your literature review is to be a section of your research, the sources you will search for need to be **related** to your research problem, objectives and questions.

For stand-alone assignments, it is recommended to **focus** on a **main question** to direct your search. This question has to be answerable without collecting original data, in other words, the information you find needs to be able to answer it with only existing publications. Afterwards, you will need to do the following things:

Make a list of keywords

- The words should be related to the topic of your research question. They may be directly related to the theme or to the possible arguments you will develop.

EXAMPLE

- Theme: Social media as factor in teenagers' insecurity
- Direct Keywords: Social media, insecurity in teenagers, insecurity, etc.
- Indirect Keywords: Addiction to social media, Addiction, Photoshop in instagram, etc.

Search for relevant sources

- After you decide on keywords, it is time to search for sources for your research question and review. You should use the databases available at your university. This include (but are not limited to):
 - The online catalogue of the University's libraries
 - JSTOR
 - Google Scholar
 - EBSCO

Step 2: Evaluate and Select Sources

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Due to time limitations, it is probably impossible to consider every material related to your research topic. As a result, you will need to evaluate which sources are relevant for your particular scope.

For each publication you should ask yourself:

- ☐ What question or problem is the author addressing?
- ☐ What are the key concepts and how are they defined?
- ☐ What are the key theories, models and methods? Does the research use established frameworks or take an innovative approach?
- ☐ What are the results and conclusions of the study?
- ☐ How does the publication relate to other literature in the field? Does it confirm, add to, or challenge established knowledge?
- ☐ How does the publication contribute to your understanding of the topic? What are its key insights and arguments?
- ☐ What are the strengths and weaknesses of the research?

Always verify the credentials of the collaborators on your source. Verify you have considered landmark studies and major theories in your field of research.

Take notes and cite sources

During your search for sources, take notes that you can later incorporate into the text of your literature review. This will help you, not only have a head start to your investigation, but also keep a log of the sources you're citing to avoid plagiarism.

Step 3: Identify Themes, Debates, and Gaps

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After choosing the sources you are interested in, the next step is to identify the similarities between the material. This is to help detect areas that need more information to elaborate analysis later on in your work.

Based on your reading and notes, you can look for:

- **Trends and patterns (in theory, method or results):** Do certain approaches become more or less popular over time?
- **Themes:** What questions or concepts recur across the literature?
- **Debates, conflicts and contradictions:** Where do sources disagree?
- **Pivotal publications:** Are there any influential theories or studies that changed the direction of the field?
- **Gaps:** What is missing from the literature? Are there weaknesses that need to be addressed?

→ This step will help you work out the structure of your literature review and (if applicable) show how your own research will contribute to existing knowledge.

Step 4: Outline your Literature Review Structure

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There are various approaches to organizing the body of a literature review. You should have a rough idea of your strategy before you start writing. Depending on the length of your literature review, you can combine several of these strategies (for example, your overall structure might be thematic, but each theme is discussed chronologically).

Chronological: The simplest approach is to trace the development of the topic over time. However, if you choose this strategy, be careful to avoid simply listing and summarizing sources in order. Try to analyze patterns, turning points and key debates that have shaped the direction of the field. Give your interpretation of how and why certain developments occurred.

Thematic: If you have found some recurring central themes, you can organize your literature review into subsections that address different aspects of the topic.

Methodological: If you draw your sources from different disciplines or fields that use a variety of research methods, you might want to compare the results and conclusions that emerge from different approaches. For example:

- Look at what results have emerged in qualitative versus quantitative research.
- Discuss how the topic has been approached by empirical versus theoretical scholarship.
- Divide the literature into sociological, historical, and cultural sources.

Theoretical: A literature review is often the foundation for a theoretical framework: You can use it to discuss various theories, models and definitions of key concepts. You might argue for the relevance of a specific theoretical approach, or combine various theoretical concepts to create a framework for your research.

Step 5: Write your Review

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After deciding on the structure of the review, you may now start the writing process.

Like any other academic text, your literature review should have an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. What you include in each depends on the objective of your literature review.

Introduction

The introduction should clearly state the focus and purpose of the literature review.

Body

Depending on the length of your literature review, you might want to divide the body into subsections. You can use subheadings for each theme, time period, or methodological approach.

As you write, you can follow these tips:

- ❑ **Summarize and synthesize:** give an overview of the main points of each source and combine them into a coherent whole.
- ❑ **Analyze and interpret:** don't just paraphrase other researchers - add your own interpretations where possible, discussing the significance of findings in relation to the literature as a whole.
- ❑ **Critically evaluate:** mention the strengths and weaknesses of your sources.
- ❑ **Write in well-structured paragraphs:** use transition words and topic sentences to draw connections, comparisons and contrasts.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, you should summarize the key findings you have taken from the literature and emphasize their significance.

Types of Sources to Review:

Types of Sources

After deciding on your research question, it is time to put it to the test. You will have to do a **trial** of your research, in other words, practice the development of your work.

If you did not do the background information steps, it is **highly recommended** to do this to obtain sources to defend your arguments.

To achieve this, the following steps are necessary:

1. **Create various outlines**: For every source, do small outlines of the main ideas. On the side, write down the important details that pertain to your research question. Afterwards, on a new paper join all information recollected in this process and see how they all connect to one another.
2. **Start a proposal**: Proposals are a great way to start the structure of your paper. It forces the writer to analyze and assess the relevancy of not only each source, but the ideas and plans one may have for the research. The outlines made in the last step will help you with the information required for this step.
3. **Repeat the process until a proposal is completed and research is the upcoming step.**

Primary

After picking the topic of your research, it is essential to select material within the field to examine as an example of your theme. This will be your **primary source**.

Primary sources are the **object of interest** of your investigation that prompt your research. Depending on the type of investigation, they may vary from a wide range of options. However, the characteristics these will share overall are:

- will share original content (scientific or creative)
- will not be interpreting or evaluating
- will share new information
- will be related to the theoretical frameworks that will be expanded (mostly in Humanities)

Some writers consider it is easier to choose a primary source and then decide on the theme of the investigation.

Primary (Example)

The following are options that may be primary sources (but not limited to) :

- Official documents
 - birth certificate
 - will
 - marriage license
 - trial transcript
- Patents
- Personal correspondence
- Photographs
- Speeches
- Transcripts of radio and television programs
- Video recordings
- Works of art, architecture, literature, and music
- Artifacts
 - furniture
 - clothing
- Audio recordings
 - radio programs
- Diaries
- Internet communications
- Interviews
 - oral histories
 - telephone
 - e-mail
- Newspaper articles written at the time

Secondary

Secondary sources are material that will **examine**, **analyze** and **interpret** your primary sources and/or the topics of your research. Although they do not necessarily have to be the evidence of your work, some secondary sources may be used as support.

These sources may be (but not limited to):

- Documents about the primary source
- Scholarly sources (academia books and articles)
- Newspaper articles
- Magazine articles
- Encyclopedias
- Journal articles

Tertiary

Tertiary sources are **fillers of information** that are necessary for the elaboration of your research. These materials will often be able to guide other works that may help you in the more analytical side of the project. In essence, the sources **recollect information**.

Some examples are (but not limited to):

- Dictionaries
- Handbooks
- Encyclopedias
- Text books
- Databases
- Statistical compendiums

While some scholars will consider secondary and tertiary sources to **serve the same function**, it is important to acknowledge that some fields have distinctions for them.

Important Notice

An important factor to consider is **WHAT** will you be doing with the source. For that reason, you should not limit a source to a certain category.

In some cases, scholarly articles may be primary sources, while some fiction works can be examples of arguments (in other words, **functioning** as a secondary source). The **same applies** for tertiary sources.

Other Helpful Material

The CDCL has other helpful material for research related work:

- Posters
 - **How to Brainstorm for a Research Topic**
- Infographics
 - **How to Check a Source's Reliability**
 - **The CRAAP TEST**
 - **The Benefits of Literature Review to Research**
- Videos
 - **Basic Steps in the Research Process**
- Modules
 - **Proposal module**
 - **[Brainstorming and Outlining](#)**

Literature Review Checklist:

- ☐ Do I connect my sources to my research question?
- ☐ Have I properly identified my sources in the categories (primary,secondary, tertiary)?
- ☐ Have I justified my sources in relation to my investigations?
- ☐ Is the investigation process doable within the time frame given for the assignment with the quantity of sources?
- ☐ Is there enough data in the selection of sources?

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Para finalizar, haga clic sobre el enlace para tomar la prueba y enviar el informe a su profesor(a):

<https://forms.gle/gTg9f1TJDkHjbaNf6>

¡Gracias por utilizar los recursos del



!

Conozca más sobre nuestros servicios virtuales:

<http://generales.uprrp.edu/competencias-linguisticas/>



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