Literature Review Development

A literature review surveys books, scholarly articles, and any other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, and by so doing, provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem being investigated. Literature reviews are designed to provide an overview of sources you have explored while researching a particular topic and to demonstrate to your readers how your research fits within a larger field of study.


Students often confuse literature reviews and annotated bibliographies. Formatting of a literature review is closer to that of an introduction of a research paper, whereas annotated bibliographies are more similar to detailed lists of citations.

Research question
Keep your research question(s) in mind while you work. Use the space below:

For each resource/article/book you plan to use in your literature review, write the source (author’s name and title of the article/book), main argument, and any comments/questions/important details about the source.

Source 1:
Main argument(s):
Notes:

Source 2:
Main argument(s):
Notes:

Source 3:
Main argument(s):
Notes:

Source 4:
Main argument(s):
Notes:

Source 5:
Main argument(s):
Notes:

Source 6:
Main argument(s):
Notes:
Questions to consider

- How do these sources work together to help you understand your topic?
- Which sources generally speak to the same idea? Which sources offer competing hypotheses?
- Are there answers that are still missing after reviewing these sources?

Recurring, complementing, and conflicting ideas

When you are writing a literature review, it can be useful to think about sources vis-à-vis how they contribute to the field’s understanding of the main themes in your topic. In the space below, use notes about your sources to develop the points you want to make. The number of ideas/categories you use will vary, and may fluctuate through the research process. Try to represent the various themes that are recurring as you read the literature. Make note of whether the authors agree, disagree, or make related but not directly correlated points.

Idea 1:
Author 1 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Author 2 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Author 3 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Idea 2:
Author 1 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Author 2 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Author 3 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Idea 3:
Author 1 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Author 2 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Author 3 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Idea 4:
Author 1 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

Author 2 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:
Author 3 with a perspective on this idea:
What he/she/they have to say about it:

For more information on writing a literature review, the University of Southern California has a helpful Literature Review Guide.