

Writing a Literature Review

A literature review is a critical evaluation of scholarly materials that have already been published. You may be asked to write a literature review as a separate assignment or as part of the introduction to an assignment. The purpose is to survey the literature that is available on a certain guiding topic and to convey that there is knowledge and ideas already established on the topic. The purpose is to also identify where there are gaps in the existing research. A literature review provides a framework for establishing the importance of studying your topic. It is written as an essay and is not divided by sources.

Main Ideas to Include (adapted from the American Psychological Association):

- Define and clarify your problem/guiding topic
- Summarize existing research to inform your reader of what is and is not known
- Identify connections, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the existing research or body of published literature
- Suggest the next step(s) in solving the problem and formulate questions about your topic that need to be further researched

Steps to Writing a Literature Review (adapted from the University of Toronto):

1. Pick a guiding topic or problem that your literature review will help to define
2. Go to the library or use the library website to find scholarly materials on your topic or problem
 - a. Define the scope for your research
 - i. Your search must be wide enough to find all relevant materials
 - ii. Your search must also be narrow enough to exclude all irrelevant materials
3. Critically analyze the literature that you have found. Consider the following questions when looking at each scholarly source:
 - a. Has the author formulated a problem/issue?
 - b. Is the problem clearly defined? Is its significance established?
 - c. Could the problem have been approached effectively from another perspective?
 - d. What is the author's research approach or theoretical framework?

- e. How sound is the study? (Look at the means of obtaining information, the ethics involved, how the information is presented, etc.)
 - f. Can you deconstruct the flow of the arguments to find any break downs in logic?
 - g. How does this source relate to the specific question or problem that you are developing?
4. Reflect on the relevance of your sources
- a. Include a summary of the major themes found in the literature
 - b. Suggest what further research is needed on the topic
 - c. Discuss flaws in reasoning, logic, or argument in the methodological approaches used in the sources
5. Cite Sources
- a. Ensure that your citations follow appropriate style guidelines as specified by your professor or by the discipline

References

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American psychological association (6th ed.)*. Washington: American Psychology Association.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. California: Sage Publications.
- Taylor, D. (2012, October 18). The literature review: A few tips on conducting it [Resource]. Retrieved from <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review>