

LITERATURE REVIEWS

WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?

A literature review is a standalone document or a section of a larger document that overviews and engages with the scholarly literature available on a particular subject. It functions as a survey of scholarly articles, books, and other critical sources relevant to a specific issue, area of research, or theory. A literature review only addresses the existing literature in a field and, not to be confused with a book review, does not provide an opinion on the sources presented. Sometimes it only covers sources published within only a particular time frame.

It is important to note that, while literature reviews can sometimes stand alone, they can also serve as a section in a thesis or dissertation or as a brief section of a research paper, depending on the needs or requirements of the specific project.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A LITERATURE REVIEW?

The goal of a literature review is to compile and synthesize key sources on a subject. To synthesize does not mean to summarize or convey the main point of a source. Instead, a synthesis shows the relationships and connections among the different sources and the writers' ideas. A comprehensive literature review provides a theoretical framework for your research, or supports the legitimacy of the research you intend to do by presenting the relevant literature (e.g. studies, texts, dissertations, etc.).

Literature reviews give readers an idea of the literature that is available in a specific field, without having to investigate on their own. They are a simple way for students and scholars to familiarize themselves with a subject. Literature reviews provide useful information and, if published, may serve as a foundation for background research in studies or other scholarly/academic writing.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A LITERATURE REVIEW?

Literature reviews can include any critical sources or research previously published on a specific topic. A literature review may also give a new interpretation of old material, combine new with old interpretations, or trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates and academic discussions.

The content included in a literature review can vary from discipline-to-discipline, and it is often best to consider the purpose and goal of a particular project and pay close attention to expectations set by the assignment prompt, journal, or field.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature reviews are often organized in the standard three section format (introduction, body, conclusion), though if the review is only a small section of a research paper, the introduction and

CONTACT US:

(702) 895-3908 | writingcenter@unlv.edu
unlv.edu/writing-center



conclusion may just be a sentence or two. Generally, the introduction section briefly discusses the central theme(s) of the literature and provides a focus or lens through which to approach the sources.

The body section examines the sources themselves, their impact on the field or subject of study, and their relevance to your research. Unlike in an annotated bibliography where the content is organized by source, in a literature review, each paragraph or section is organized by topic, theme or relevant issue, and multiple sources are discussed within each. Here are a few of the most common ways of organizing the body information:

- Chronological: Organized by publication date
- Topical: Organized by topic
- Major models/theories: Organized by existing or prominent theories
- Thematic: Organized by theme; usually a more specific approach than organizing by topic
- Methodological: Organized by research approaches and data collection and analysis techniques
- History: Organized by historical timeline

The conclusion summarizes the major contributions of significant studies and/or articles and draws attention to any methodological flaws, inconsistencies, or gaps in the research. If the literature review is a section in a larger research project, the conclusion will also lead up to the writer's research questions.

Remember that each body paragraph should address and synthesize information from more than one source, in keeping with your organizing principle.

ADDITIONAL LITERATURE REVIEW RESOURCES

If you need help identifying reliable and robust sources for your literature review or larger project, consider making an appointment with a [research librarian](#):



If you are working on a research project, thesis, or dissertation, and need help tracking and organizing your sources, consider trying a [citation manager](#):

