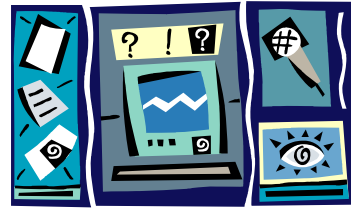


HOW to

Write a Literature Review



A **literature review** surveys scholarly articles, books and other sources (e.g. dissertations, conference proceedings) relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, providing a description, summary, and critical evaluation of each work. The purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on a topic.

Components of a Literature Review

A literature review requires four stages:

- Problem formulation—which topic or field is being examined and what are its component issues?
- Literature search—finding materials relevant to the subject being explored
- Data evaluation—determining which literature makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the topic
- Analysis and interpretation—discussing the findings and conclusions of pertinent literature

Source: Lyons, K. (2003, July 19 ,2002). **How to Write a Literature Review**

Literature reviews should include the following elements:

- An overview of the subject, issue or theory under consideration, along with the objectives of the literature review
- Division of works under review into categories (e.g. those in support of a particular position, those against, and those offering alternative theses entirely)
- Explanation of how each work is similar to and how it varies from the others
- Conclusions as to which pieces are best considered in their argument, are most convincing of their opinions, and make the greatest contribution to the understanding and development of their area of research

In assessing each piece, consider the following factors:

- What are the author's credentials? Are the author's arguments supported by evidence (e.g. primary historical material, case studies, narratives, statistics, recent scientific findings)?
- Is the author's perspective even-handed or prejudicial? Is contrary data considered or is certain pertinent information ignored to prove the author's point?
- Which of the author's theses are most/least convincing?

- Are the author's arguments and conclusions convincing? Does the work ultimately contribute in any significant way to an understanding of the subject?

Why Do You Need Literature Review?

A literature review may constitute an essential part of your senior project. The purpose of a literature review is to:

- Find out what has and has not been investigated.
- Learn how others have defined and measured key concepts.
- Identify data sources that other researchers have used.
- Identify new ways to interpret or clarify gaps in previous research
- Discover how a research project is related to the work of others.
- Resolve conflicts among previous studies that may appear to be contradictory
- Identify areas of prior research to prevent duplication of effort
- Identify areas for further research
- The literature review itself does not present new *primary* scholarship

Parts excerpted from Johnson, J. (1991) Political science research methods Washington, DC: C.Q Press.

A Literature Review is NOT

An Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

A Literary Review

A literary review is a brief critical discussion about the merits and weaknesses of a literary work such as a play, novel, or a book of poems.

A Book Review

A book review is a brief critical discussion about the merits and weaknesses of a particular book. Book reviews of creative works are sometimes called literary reviews.

Additional Resources

- Literature Reviews: http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html
- Tips for Conducting Literature Reviews: <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html>
- How to Write a Literature Review:
<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html>