

Literature Reviews

A good literature review shows the reader (your instructor) that you have done the background reading around your topic and that you've understood the important issues around your topic.

What Is A Literature Review?

A literature review:

- Focuses on a specific topic – your argument or problem as stated in your thesis
- Compiles the research that has been published on the topic by recognized scholars and researchers
- Informs the reader about the current concepts and state of research on the topic and any controversies
- Describes the pros and cons of particular studies and may suggest areas for further research
- Organizes the citations thematically into a narrative that can serve as the introduction to your report or that can be an individual essay

A literature review is NOT:

- A literary review describing and evaluating a specific book, poem, play, etc.
- An exhaustive, alphabetical list of every work consulted in your research, nor a list of references cited
- An annotated bibliography listing references and adding a brief notes about the value of each source

From Edgewood College Library's [Writing a Review of the Literature](#)

Content Of The Review

A literature review should contain an introduction, a body and a conclusion, and should be centered on a main idea or argument about the literature you are reviewing. Section headers are useful to highlight the main points for the reader; however the different sections should flow together.

Section

Introduction

Your introduction (usually approx. $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ page) will not only present the main topic, but will also make a statement about the status of knowledge in this area of research. This usually involves reporting what is known about a topic and what is problematic about it. Knowledge deficits are crucial to literature reviews—such deficits are usually spoken about in terms of effects on particular populations, gaps in the research, and other contexts where the research could be useful. Additionally, your introduction will include a statement that outlines what issues within the broader topic (main ideas and subtopics) will be presented and in what order. Sources are often identified in this section but don't have to be.

Body

In order for your reader to move through your information with ease while keeping the big picture in view, order your body paragraphs in the same way that you did in the statement about how your literature review will proceed. Order the main ideas from general to specific, deciding which sources have contributions to make to which concepts. You will then present more specific information from the sources, using in-text citation, to discuss the main ideas in more detail and to point out areas of agreement or debate among sources. Your body paragraphs should work to not only summarize what sources have said, but to demonstrate relationships between them.

Conclusion

You should conclude (about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 page) by reminding readers of the main topics and sub topics

by identifying points of consensus and debate that have been presented in your literature review. Identify new possibilities for knowledge making, new gaps in knowledge—what else could be looked at now that scholars know this information? Are there other contexts that need to be examined? Gaps in the research so far? You also want to include statements about what communities are best served by this knowledge—where and for whom is the information most relevant?

From the University of the Fraser Valley Writing Centre's [Literature Reviews](#)

Some Possible Ways Of Structuring A Literature Review

OPTION 1

- I. Introduction
- II. Article X
 - a) Summarize the article (when and how was the study done, what was its key focus, etc.).
 - b) Describe in detail what the article says about:
 - a) Sub-issue #1 (e.g., gender)
 - b) Sub-issue #2 (e.g., lifestyle)
 - c) Sub-issue #3 (e.g., diet)
- Article Y
(Same procedure)
- Article Z
(Same procedure)
- III. Compare, Contrast and Critique a) What all three say about sub-issue #1
 - b) What all three say about sub-issue #2
 - c) What all three say about sub-issue #3
- IV. Draw Conclusions, by answering these questions:
 - So what?
 - Where do I stand now?
 - Where does this leave us?
 - What next?

OPTION 2

- I. Introduction
- II. Brief Summaries (perhaps one paragraph for each of the articles, X, Y and Z)
- III. Compare, Contrast and Critique what the three articles say about:
 - Sub-issue #1 (e.g., gender)
 - Sub-issue #2 (e.g., lifestyle)
 - Sub-issue #3 (e.g., diet)
- IV. Draw Conclusions

From Memorial University Writing Centre's [A Process for Reviewing and Analyzing Literature](#)

Sample Literature Reviews

[Adolescent Depression and Attachment](#) by Ima G. Ststudent. Purdue University, Online Writing Lab (OWL)

[Literature Review Libguide](#), California State University (CSU), ReSEARCH Station

[Literature Review Template](#), Thompson Rivers University Writing Lab

[Writing a Short Literature Review](#) by William Ashton, Ph.D. York College, CUNY