

Literature Review

A literature review identifies what is already known about your area of research. It is a synthesis of the information listed in your bibliography or annotated bibliography.

What is a literature review?



What is the purpose of a literature review?



A literature review fulfils several purposes in a research project. According to Tolich and Davidson (2011), the literature sets out to answer the following questions:

1. What have others said about this topic?
2. What theories address this topic?
3. What do these theories say?
4. What research has been done previously?
5. Is the existing research in agreement, or is there disagreement?
6. Are there flaws or contradictions in the existing literature?

Steps to Create a Literature Review

Step 1

- Identify the keywords to use for searching. You may need to think broadly, for example, if searching binge drinking amongst adolescents, you might also use "teenagers," "alcohol abuse," or "adolescent risk behaviours."
- Cover research that addresses the topic from all viewpoints to avoid bias in your literature review.
- Use [library databases](#), follow library advice on [finding information](#), and [talk to librarians](#) for assistance.
- Search for relevant credible literature from reliable sources.

1. Search for relevant literature

Step 2

- Organise the literature into
 - highly relevant
 - relevant
 - may be relevant
 - don't think it is relevant but keep just in case.

2. Organise the information according to relevance

Step 3

- Sort the literature into groups according to subject, ideas, or other aspects/themes relating to your topic. It can be helpful to use a matrix/table format with key themes in row headings and articles listed separately in column headings. Make notes for each article according to the relevant themes. See the *Literature Review Template* in the [Thinking Tools](#) study guides
- Organise the themes and literature logically so that the current state of knowledge is revealed.

3. Sort the literature according to subject or idea

Step 4

Write an annotation for each article covering the following:

- Introduction/Overview of the content (e.g., "This article investigates ...").
- Aims and research methods used (e.g., "The authors use ..., "The authors investigated ...").
- Scope of the research (e.g., "The research focuses on ...").
- Identify parts that are relevant (e.g., "The conclusion/finding/ of ... is relevant to my topic as it relates to ...").
- Strengths or limitations of the research (e.g., "However, this study ..., "Limitations to this study are ...").
- Conclusions (e.g., "The authors conclude that ...").
- Reflection regarding how this research fits with your research project (e.g., "This article will provide the basis of ..., "This article provides supplementary information ..., "This article will provide supporting/contradictory evidence ...").

4. Write annotations

Step 5

Construct an outline to place the main points in logical order (remember to structure around ideas and themes rather than authors and studies).

- Look for trends and an easy flow of ideas.
- Place general information first, then increasingly focus on the specific, leading to your research question.

5. Construct a plan

Step 6

Include the following sections:

- **Introduction:** Introduce the context of your topic, the aims and scope of your research, and an outline of the key themes.
- **Body:** Address each theme and ensure there is a logical flow from one theme to the next. Use [transitional words](#) and phrases to show the relationship of ideas.
- **Conclusion:** Write a summary of the major findings of current research, including area of agreement or disagreement, inconsistencies, and areas that have not yet been researched.

6. Write the literature review

Material adapted from

Student Learning Support Centre. Victoria University of Wellington. (n.d.). *Writing a literature review*.

http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/Slss/studyhub/handouts/Writing%20A%20%20Literature%20Review.pdf

Useful Guides

[Bibliography and Annotated Bibliography](#)

[Critical Thinking](#)

[Literature Review Template](#)

Reference

Tolich, M. N., & Davidson, C. (2011). *An introduction to research methods: Getting started*. Pearson.

Updated December 2021