

Literature review summary

Introduction

Purpose

You may need to write a literature review

- As a standalone assignment which builds understanding of the important literature in your field
- As part of a longer process which leads to a more complex project later

Steps to writing a literature review

1. Read the assignment instructions to ensure you understand the task.
2. Analyse the topic to ensure you understand the scope of the task.
3. Conduct research to find potentially useful texts.
4. Select appropriate sources by evaluating your research to find the most suitable articles.
5. Record the bibliographic details of each source, ensuring you apply the correct referencing style.
6. Create a spreadsheet for your notes so you can retrieve key information easily.
7. Evaluate the most useful texts to demonstrate how they relate to the assignment topic.
8. Make notes of the key points, and strengths and weaknesses of these texts as they relate to the topic.
9. Reflect on the what you have learned, considering how the different articles compare and contrast, build your understanding of the topic and what different perspectives are provided.
10. Categorise your notes using sub-headings to organise the body of your literature review.
11. Use your plan to write your first draft.
12. Edit and proofread the draft, checking citations and accuracy.

Structure and content

Introduction	Set the context by giving background information Outline your main aim or argument in your thesis statement Show how your review will be structured
Body paragraphs	Identify a suitable organisational method for the literature review, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geographical organisation• Chronological organisation• Thematic organisation• Methodological organisation
Conclusion	Restate your thesis statement Summarise your key points Make a concluding statement

Useful strategies

Organising your notes

Writing a literature review requires you to store and organise your notes effectively. Consider using

- A spreadsheet
- Visual organisers
- A matrix

Writing the body

When you write the body of your literature review, you need to use a range of skills.

- Paragraphing – divide the body into paragraphs which present and develop one main idea
- Paraphrasing and summarising – use your own words to present key points
- Referencing – ensure you follow the correct referencing style for your discipline

Selecting sources and evaluating sources

- Use the CRAAP test to choose your sources. Does the source have currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose?
- Read the source and focus on overall credibility; quality of the argument and evidence; and tone and style of writing.

Evaluating research

Introduction and literature review Is the hypothesis or aim of the research clear? Do the researchers clearly show that their study is meeting a need or filling a gap in our knowledge? Do the researchers show how their study builds on previous research?	Results Are data analysis tools identified? Are the steps in the data analysis explained and justified? Are the results relevant to the aim? Are the results explained? Do tables and graphs support the explanation?
Method Is any theoretical framework explained and justified? Is the study design made clear? Is a rationale given for the chosen method? How detailed is the methods section? Do the researchers explain how they control variables?	Discussion and conclusions Are conclusions supported by the results? Do the researchers discuss the extent of their success? Do the researchers discuss the limitations? Does the discussion section contribute to scholarly debate on the topic?

Useful language

Identifying important research or researchers

Use signpost language to provide a context for your reader. For example:

- Study X established a new...
- Much of what is known about X is based on the work of Smith (1988).
- Most influential in this field is work by Smith...
- It is now well established from studies conducted in Germany that ...
- A growing body of literature based on the work of X recognises ...

- In his/her/their _____ study (of _____), Smith (2012) showed that.....

Compare and contrast research

Show how different studies/researchers can provide a range of perspectives on an issue. For example:

- Studies examining job conditions in Australian resource towns indicate women are discouraged from participating in the workforce (Gill, 1990a; Judd et al., 2002). In contrast, McLeod (2008) describes plentiful employment opportunities for women in a Canadian resource town.
- Fong's (2012) interpretation differs from that/contrasts with that/ is different from that of Smith and Jones (2004) who argue that
- Fong's (2012) interpreted x as... Similarly/Likewise/In the same way, later research in Japan explained X as...

Identify how the research contributes to our understanding of a topic

Show your critical analysis by pointing out how the research contributes to our knowledge. For example:

- It had been thought that some mangrove species were not able to photosynthesise when temperatures reached 35°C or more. This understanding was developed by a recent study by Liang et al (2019) which showed that leaf temperatures as low as 30° C can prevent photosynthesis.
- Work by Smith (1988) extends our understanding of X.
- Previously, academics in the field had believed....until a breakthrough by Smith (1988) showed... Important work by Smith (1988) established a new view of...

Identify limitations in the research

Show your critical analysis by pointing out limitations to the research. For example:

- Simpson et al stated that their study was limited by the fact that they were forced to use convenience sampling, which is inferior to random sampling (2004)
- One major drawback of X is that ...
- The main limitation of X, however, is ...
- All the studies reviewed so far, however, suffer from the fact that ...
- Research on the subject has been mostly restricted to limited comparisons of