**Literature Review Chapter Template**

Thanks for downloading the template. **Here’s what you need to know:**

This document provides a generic template for the literature review chapter in a typical dissertation, thesis or research project. While the **exact requirements will vary between universities** and degree programs, this template should help you get started with the generic essentials. Be sure to follow any instructions or guidance provided by your university to ensure you’re aligned with their specific requirements.

In each section, we’ll briefly **explain what that section is all about** and the essential things that you **need to achieve there**. We’ll also provide links to additional videos and blog posts that will help you conquer each section with confidence.

If you’re new to research, a good starting point would be to watch our YouTube video covering the literature review process from start to end: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw8HPXJP1VA>

[Graphical user interface, application, Teams

Description automatically generated](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw8HPXJP1VA)

If you need **1-on-1 assistance** with your dissertation or thesis, feel free to [book an initial consultation](https://my.gradcoach.com/book/new/) with us to discuss private coaching for your project.

Good luck with your research!

***Grad Coach***

# **Before You Start**

We know you’re eager to get started writing up your literature review chapter. However, before you do this, it’s important to make sure you’ve **covered the groundwork**, or you’ll end up writing and re-writing your literature review chapter, wasting valuable time.

## **Step 1: Identify and read the relevant literature**

While it can be very tempting to get moving, it’s essential to **complete the reading** before you start the writing. You cannot start writing your literature chapter if you’re still digesting content, as your arguments will develop as you consume more content.

Here are a few points to keep in mind:

1. The literature you rely on should be **high-quality**, **academic** in nature, and **relevant.**
2. Ideally, your literature collection should include a strong base of **peer-reviewed journal articles** with a high H index.
3. You’ll need to use **empirical research studies**, seminal papers on your topic, and relevant theoretical papers.

If you need help or guidance locating high-quality and relevant literature, you can try the following:

1. Watch our [video on finding high-quality literature](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEoHJXhk8g0).
2. Read our [detailed blog post](https://gradcoach.com/literature-review-sourcing/) covering the same.
3. If you’re stuck, consider engaging with a [dissertation coach](https://gradcoach.com/literature-review-help/) to get 1-on-1 help.

***Tip*** - For your initial search of the literature, you **don’t need** to read each journal article from start to end. You can focus on a few important sections that will give you a good indication of whether any given resource is relevant. We explain [this technique here](https://gradcoach.com/how-to-read-journal-articles-quickly-efficiently/).

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## **Step 2: Organize your sources**

As you read through and digest the seemingly endless stream of journal articles and papers, you’ll need to organize your sources so that you can synthesize the content (discussed next) and have it readily accessible when it's time to write up. Don’t skip this step, as there’s simply **no way you’ll remember** the fine details of each resource by the time you’ve read 100+ articles.

***Reference manager***

It’s essential that you get your reference/citation data in place from day one, or you’ll be scrambling to hunt down references when you write up your chapter.

To help you organize the existing literature, you should use a reference manager (don’t try to manage your referencing manually). Two free options are **Mendeley** and **Zotero.** These work on both PC and Mac, and are very straightforward. We have easy-to-follow guides for both of these on our YouTube channel:

* [How to use Mendeley](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTfVCiksapk)
* [How to use Zotero](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0RrNu89oAM)

While you’re at it, you may also want to watch our video covering the [7 most common referencing mistakes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPVJue8VZd8).

***Literature catalog***

In addition to managing your references, you’ll also need to create a **literature catalog** to keep track of the key details of the various papers you’ve read. Ideally, you should capture (at least) the following for each resource:

1. Author(s) and date
2. Category/keyword
3. Context (e.g., country, industry, demographic, etc.)
4. Key findings
5. Methodology (e.g., qual, quant, or mixed methods.)
6. Useful quotes
7. Your own notes (e.g., links to your research questions.)

With this information on hand, you’ll be able to filter and sort your resources with ease and **quickly find the information** you need when it comes time to get writing. Also, the more detailed you are in the catalog, the easier it will be to synthesize the information from the literature you’ve collected (which we discuss next).

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| Excel literature review template  **Free Resource:**  While you’re welcome to create your own literature catalog, we also offer a **free literature catalog** template available for [download on the website.](https://gradcoach.com/literature-review-excel-template/) |

## **Step 3: Synthesize**

The final (and most important) step prior to writing up your chapter is to digest and **synthesize all the literature** you’ve consumed. In simple terms, this means putting the pieces of the puzzle together to make sense of all the articles and papers you’ve collected.

You can approach the synthesis stage by asking the following questions:

1. What does the literature currently say about the topic you’re investigating?
2. Is the literature lacking or well established?
3. Is it divided or in disagreement? If there are contesting views, why might this be?
4. What gaps exist in the current research and how does that inform your research project?
5. How does your research fit into the existing body of literature?
6. How does your research contribute something original?
7. How does the methodology of previous studies help you develop your own?

If you’re able to answer these questions, you’ll have a better understanding of not only the current state of the research, but also how to structure your own literature review in a clear, logical fashion, that aligns with your golden thread (i.e., research aims, objectives and research questions).

# **Structure: The Literature Review Chapter**

Now that you’ve read, organized, and synthesized the relevant literature for your study, you’re ready to start writing up your chapter.

The first step is to **develop an outline structure**. Depending on your preference, this outline can be fairly loose with just general thoughts – or it can be relatively detailed with the exact content you will cover and the order in which it will be presented. Whatever the case, it’s essential to start with an outline before you start writing, or you’ll end up waffling and spending a lot of time re-writing.

The literature review chapter typically consists of **three sections**:

1. The **introduction**
2. The core/**body**
3. The **conclusion**/summary

Here’s what you’ll need to cover in each of these sections:

## **The Introduction**

This section needs to **introduce the chapter** to your reader and help orient them in terms of what to expect. This is usually quite short, consisting of a few paragraphs.

Typically, you’ll cover the following in your introduction section:

1. A quick reminder of your study’s **topic**.
2. A brief explanation of the **purpose** of the literature review chapter.
3. An outline of the **scope** of your literature review (what you will and won’t cover).
4. A brief overview outlining the **layout** of the chapter.

Keep the introduction section concise. There’s no need to go into detail here – save your word count for the body section, as this is where you’ll earn marks.

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## **The Body**

This is the core part of the literature review chapter. The goal of this section is to **present, analyze, evaluate and synthesize** the existing research and other scholarly literature that you read.

There are a few ways to structure the body section, including **chronologically** (according to date), **methodologically** (according to research methodologies), and **thematically** (grouped by theme). In this template, we’ll assume a thematic structure, as this is the most common approach. If you’re interested in the other options, be sure to check out the [Grad Coach blog](https://gradcoach.com/blog/).

When drawing up the body section thematically, you’re going to present sections based on the relevant **themes or categories** related to your topic that emerged from recurring patterns or ideas within the existing literature. Structuring this section of your literature review thematically involves structuring your literature review’s body section to discuss each of these themes, one section at a time.

**Examples:**

* *If you are researching which factors contribute toward people trusting an organization, you could structure your discussion according to each factor/variable, such as consumers’ perceptions of an organization’s competence, benevolence, and integrity*
* *If your research topic explores how student support and self-care affect well-being among university students, your themes might include mental health, university student resources, counseling, self-care practices, models of student well-being, etc.*

Here are some questions to ask yourself when structuring your literature review by themes:

1. Are there any **patterns** that have come to light in the literature?
2. What are the central **themes** and **categories** used by the researchers?
3. What are the **variables** of interest (especially in the case of quantitative research)?

Importantly, keep your **golden thread** (i.e., your research aims, objectives, and research questions) front of mind when deciding how to structure this section, as you should aim to have a **tight linkage** between the literature review chapter and the golden thread. For example, if your research aims involve identifying factors that impact a specific outcome, it will typically make sense to structure the body section factor by factor.

Depending on the nature of your research, you may also present a **theoretical framework** toward the end of the body section, based on the literature that was discussed. If you do, make sure that your theoretical framework is **firmly rooted in the preceding discussion**, i.e., that there is a natural flow from the text to the framework.

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## **The Conclusion**

Once you’ve completed the body section of your literature review (whether you presented this thematically, chronologically or methodologically), you’ll need to “wrap up” your literature review with a conclusion section.

In the conclusion section, you’ll need to recap and highlight the key findings of your literature review. Specifically, you should:

1. Emphasize the research that is especially important to your **research questions**.
2. Highlight the **research** **gaps** that exist in the literature.
3. **Justify** your own research by showing how it will help fill one or more of the gaps you identified.

As with the introduction section, you need to keep this section **concise**. Don’t ramble on and don’t become repetitive. Highlight the key takeaways and wrap up your literature review.

# **Free Resources**

Here are a few more resources you might find useful while working on your literature review:

* [Literature Review 101: What exactly is a literature review?](https://gradcoach.com/what-is-a-literature-review/)
* [How To Write A Literature Review: 3-Step process](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw8HPXJP1VA)
* [5 Time-Saving Tips: The Literature Review](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntDPSqVP2V4)
* [7 Common Literature Review Mistakes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MVvRcgaBRI)
* [Free Dissertation/Thesis Writing Course](https://gradcoach.com/dissertation-course/)

If you would like **1-on-1 support** with your literature review (or any other chapter), check out our [private coaching service here](https://gradcoach.com/dissertation-coaching/).