

What is it?

A PhD literature review is a critical assessment of the literature in your field and related to your specific research topic.

What should it include?

The job of a literature review is to show five things:

1. What has been written on your topic
2. Who the key authors are and what the key works are
3. The main theories and hypotheses
4. The main themes that exist in the literature
5. Gaps and weaknesses that your study will then help fill

Make sure it:

1. Provides sufficient background information so that your own research problem can be contextualised
2. Discusses how, how well, or even if others have solved similar problems
3. Outlines the methods used by others when discussing similar problems
4. Is either structured chronologically or thematically

What should you avoid?

- Don't drown in a sea of authors
- Don't just summarise texts, be critical of them
- Don't spend too long reviewing the literature at the expense of conducting fieldwork
- Don't be mean. Being critical is not the same as being mean.

How can you make it great?

- Remember to always be critical
- Speak with authority
- Read an article through once without taking notes, then read it again while making notes
- Think like a detective. Understand what others have written, why, and how it relates to your study.
- Don't take everything at face value. Be critical of it.

How does it relate to other chapters?

- For your own study to make sense, it has to be situated in the literature. That means you must relate it to what others are talking about.
- The literature review will provide context for your research questions, aims and objective, and will lead naturally into your theory framework discussion.
- The literature review provides the intellectual family tree for your study, situating it in the broader context of a particular field or discipline.

Notes:

