# Thinking about your Literature Review

A literature review is your way of convincing the reader that you know what you are talking about and why. It helps to establish your expertness within, and the authority of which you can speak about your subject. It also sets the scene for your project.

Have a look at the paired statements below that can be used to describe what a literature review is and its purpose. Within each pair, identify which statement is correct.

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| 1. It is a list of everything that you have read. | It is a relevant selection of everything you have read. |
| 1. It includes everything that has been written about the subject. | It includes a relevant selection of the literature. |
| 1. It is structured by the order in which things were read. | It is structured by theme/topic. |
| 1. It is structured by themes. | It is structured by individual sources. |
| 1. It is a description of things you have read. | It is your expert understanding and evaluation of your subject. |

Focussing on the different aspects of the literature review can be useful to help plan and write it. The aspects can overlap and vary in importance depending on the dissertation and subject. Generally, the literature review can be considered from four different aspects, listed below. Under each aspect are some prompt questions to get you thinking and writing. Have a go at answering them. These questions are not subject-specific nor an exhaustive list – add some more of your own! When writing the literature, these aspects may be intertwined or considered separately depending on the context of the dissertation.

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| 1. **Demonstrating your knowledge and familiarity in your subject:**   What are the significant and established themes of your subject? What are the relevant sources? Why? Are they reliable sources? Why?  What are the recent developments in your subject? Are they significant? Why?  *(Demonstrating your knowledge and familiarity in your subject continued)*  What are the appropriate methods of research in your subject? |
| 1. **Your critical analysis of the subject:**   Where are the gaps or flaws in the literature? What are they?  Are there areas of controversy in your subject? What are they?  What are the strengths and weaknesses of the themes of your subject? What evidence have you found that supports this? |
| 1. **Summarizing your thoughts:**   What do you think? Why do you think that? *(This is about giving your thoughts, based on the evidence you have gathered).*  How does your project link into this? Why does it need to be undertaken? *(Try to give an explicit statement for your reader).*  What are the most appropriate research methods to your project and why? |
| 1. **Structuring your literature review:**   What are the main themes of your dissertation? What order do you need to use to explain this to someone else?  What is the scope of your dissertation? What is *not* within the scope of your dissertation? *(These should not feature prominently in the literature review).* |