

Quick advice for your literature review

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1. Summarise:

Your job with the lit review is to give a high-level overview of the previous literature. Your job here is to extract the main ideas in previous papers and explain and highlight your contribution.

2. Sell your potential contribution:

This is counter-intuitive, but you should treat the lit review as an opportunity to sell your work while describing what we already know. In a good lit review the emphasis is *on the selling*.

Think of yourself a seller that is trying to convince the reader of why your research is worth their time. Your contribution should be front and center, and previous work should take a back seat. To illustrate what I mean, the two sentences below convey almost the same information but presented in different ways:

- **Option A:** All previous Toyota models include plenty of safety features like airbags, enhanced breaking, etc., but this new model includes collision sensors.
- **Option B:** This new Toyota model includes a new collision sensor along with the extensive list of safety features of previous models.

Many people use option A when writing a literature review. Although this is not wrong, this style puts a lot of emphasis on what previous papers did, and it obscures what is new. Instead, option B puts the new features front and center while acknowledging what is already there. The last paragraphs of the introduction of this [paper](#) provide an example of a lit review written using style option B.

3. Things to avoid:

- Lit reviews that are just a list of paper summaries. The idea is that you should be able to relate papers into “buckets” and highlight the contribution you are making to each bucket.
- Writing that dismisses previous research. You can always write your contribution using a constructive tone.