

5 steps

to a good literature review ...



1.

What is the point of a literature review?

- ↓ Systematically explore what has been written on a topic.
- ↓ Summarise key findings, concepts and arguments.
- ↓ Establish patterns, connections and dynamics in the topic literature.
- ↓ Identify research gaps, conflicting evidence and weak arguments.

2. How to search for literature?

Searching for literature can be a bit like looking for a needle in a haystack ... Even worse, given not only the amount of literature available for any given topic, but also the way that search engine algorithms 'prejudice' searches.

It is a good idea to start with the resources indicated in your unit: journal databases and library search engines. Google Scholar and other scholarly search engines can also be useful.

One key thing that makes good literature searches is **starting from some philosophical clarity of your own**. Don't just include topic words in your search strings. Also use words that inform your searches with your own philosophical outlook.

For example. If you believe assessment should be about informing future learning, rather than 'grading', use terms that will help you find literature discussing these issues. So instead of a search string that reads "assessment in teaching", you might try "assessment and knowledge construction".



3. Reading the literature



For reading to be useful it must be **intentional**. This means you should be looking for things in the reading.




In particular you should be looking for **information, ideas and arguments**, and the links and contradictions between them.

Your reading should also be compelling you to **reflect on your own assumptions, beliefs and values**.



Intentional reading by and large requires systematic note-taking. Use a note-taking system that suits you. If you are using paper, the old writing in the margins is still as useful as always. If you are reading digitally, there is a massive range of e-tools available for computers and tablets to help you 'annotate'.

4. Summarising & analysing the reading



When you have finished a reading, make a **summary of the key information, terms, and concepts** you found in the reading.



Assess how relevant the reading is to your specific topic.

Make a list of findings (information), points, issues and ideas from the reading that you need to pursue further by extending your literature search.

5. Writing the literature review

Introduction:

outlining the purpose and scope of the literature review

identifying what you consider relevant, appropriate and credible literature

The body should include paragraphs:

identifying and critically analysing the main points and arguments in the literature

exploring context and historical background

acknowledging the various research methodologies and theoretical perspectives guiding the literature

identifying gaps in the research and literature

Conclusion: discussing your critique of the ideas and arguments found in the literature

Bibliography: properly referenced using specified referencing guide