

Research Methodology

Literature Review

Questions

- Remember what you did in your last research project for literature review.
- Discuss with class.
- What was your approach?
- What is your current understanding of literature review?
- Why do it at all?
- What purpose does it serve?

Why?

- Identify current knowledge.
- Identify existing theories.
- Explore methods used to approach a research problem.
- Identify the current gaps in literature.
- Critically analyse the gathered knowledge.
- Reflect on it.
- Critique it.
- Explore dimensions for newer ways to approach the problem.

"In writing the literature review, the purpose is to **convey** to the reader what **knowledge** and **ideas** have been established on a topic, and what their **strengths** and **weaknesses** are. The literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (eg. your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing, or your argumentative thesis). It is **not** just a descriptive list of the material available, or a **set of summaries**.

- *University of Toronto*

Why Write Literature Review?

- A good literature review doesn't just summarize sources – it analyzes, synthesizes, and critically evaluates to give a clear picture of the state of knowledge on the subject.
- The literature review gives you a chance to:
 - Demonstrate your familiarity with the topic and scholarly context
 - Develop a theoretical framework and methodology for your research
 - Position yourself in relation to other researchers and theorists
- Show how your research addresses a gap or contributes to a debate.
- The purpose is to evaluate the current state of research and demonstrate your knowledge of scholarly debates around a topic.
- If you are writing a literature review as a stand-alone assignment, you will have to choose a focus and develop a central question to direct your search.

Evaluate and select sources

- Evaluate which sources are most relevant to your questions.
- You must always keep your eyes and mind open for the knowledge you are searching for.
- Make sure the sources you use are credible, and make sure you read any landmark studies and major theories in your field of research.

Organize your literature review

- Give a structure to your review.
- Identify:
 - **Trends and patterns (in theory, method or results)**
 - **Themes:** what questions or concepts recur across the literature?
 - **Debates, conflicts and contradictions:** where do sources disagree?
 - **Pivotal publications:** are there any influential theories or studies that changed the direction of the field?
 - **Gaps:** what is missing from the literature? Are there weaknesses that need to be addressed?

Literature Review structure

- Create a mind-map to outline your literature review's structure.
- You may arrange your literature review:
 - **Chronological**
 - **Thematic**: identify recurrent themes.
 - **Methodological**: you might want to compare the results and conclusions that emerge from different approaches/methods used in different research work you study.
 - Eg. Look at what results have emerged in qualitative versus quantitative research
 - Discuss how the topic has been approached by empirical versus theoretical scholarship
 - Divide the literature into sociological, historical, and cultural sources.
 - **Theoretical**: A literature review is often the foundation for a theoretical framework. You can use it to discuss various theories, models, and definitions of key concepts.

Writing your literature review

- Like any other academic text, your literature review should have an **introduction**, a **main body**, and a **conclusion**. What you include in each depends on the objective of your literature review.
- Body of the literature review:
 - **Summarize and synthesize:** give an overview of the main points of each source and combine them into a coherent whole
 - **Analyze and interpret:** don't just paraphrase other researchers—add your own interpretations where possible, discussing the significance of findings in relation to the literature as a whole
 - **Critically evaluate:** mention the strengths and weaknesses of your sources
 - **Write in well-structured paragraphs:** use transition words and topic sentences to draw connections, comparisons and contrasts.

Like any art, it gets better with practice and theoretical knowledge of the art.

Advanced topics to explore for curious minds

- Scoping Review
- Systematic Review
- Meta-analysis
- Narrative Synthesis

Sources used in this presentation

- <https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/literature-review/>
- <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/literature-review/>