

What is a Literature Review?

Literature reviews summarize and synthesize existing scholarship and arguments on a given topic. They can be a section of a paper or a style of academic paper. They act as an overview of research on a subject for those unfamiliar with the topic.

Steps to write a literature review:

- 1-Research
- 2-Annotated Bibliography OR table exercise
- 3-Outline your paper
- 4-Write your first draft

Step 1: Research

Choose which databases you will search. Often, 2-3 databases will provide comprehensive coverage. You can find recommendations for databases in research guides or talk to a subject librarian. Within the chosen databases, select your key terms. Adjust your key terms until you are happy with the results.

Don't know how to start? Try this exercise!

I am researching _____ because I want to find out
what/why/how _____ to help my reader understand _____

In a database combine terms with the Boolean Operators. If you are new to using databases or Boolean phrases, please consider meeting with a librarian or attending a library workshop.

Quick Research Tips:

- Try to narrow down database results to 100 or less
- Use Zotero to save results; download it at [Zotero.org](https://www.zotero.org)
- Read the abstract before you save an article to ensure it's within scope
- Feeling overwhelmed? **Pause.** Remember the point of a literature review?
To provide context for your research, which means you are in charge!

Step 2: Annotated Bibliography/ Table exercise

Do the evaluative work as you go and write an annotation after you finish reading. There is a worksheet for Annotated Bibliographies at:

<https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-8mfg-sr91>

As you read and evaluate you are looking for the following threads to talk about in your literature review:

- Concepts, theories and repeated authors
- Patterns, gaps, and contradictions
- Models and methods
- Key insights and arguments

Rather than formatting your annotated bibliography in essay form, another way to format it is as a table with Google Sheets or Excel.

Citation	Annotation/Summary	Theory Used	Quotes to use:
Don't forget Zotero!	Helpful information for when you are essay writing	Create as many tabs as you want/need!	Pulling quotes as you read will save you time later

Quick Research Tip:

- The amount of sources you should read will vary from project to project. Your professor, advisor, or trusted mentor can help you decide.

Step 3: Outline your paper

Not all papers will have these sections, but you should think about the arc of your paper. You don't have to write the sections in order.

Abstract: Your ideas exclusively. Often this is written last as it is a summary.

Introduction: Includes your topic, a summary of the sections in your paper, and thesis. For longer assignments this can be several pages long!

Literature Review: Summarize existing scholarship on your topic, including information on methods if applicable.

Body of Paper: As many sections as you detailed in your introduction. This is where your own data collection, ethnography, or study would go.

Conclusion: Your ideas exclusively.

Citation List: In-line citations should match the style of your bibliography.

Appendix: Include detailed information in your paper that would be distracting in the main body of the paper. Examples: mathematical proofs, lists of words, the questionnaire used in the research, a detailed description of an apparatus used in the research, etc.

Step 4: Go write the thing. You got this.

If you made an annotated bibliography, you basically have a first draft of your literature review already! Add some topic sentences and start to group those evaluations in paragraph form.

There are numerous writing centers on campus depending on your affiliation. Ask your instructor for a recommendation if you don't know where to go.